The Affective Temporalities of Intimacy:
Lesbian Feminism and Contemporary Literature

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Abstract

This dissertation situates itself within the second decade of the twenty-first century, specifically within the contested space of the contemporary mainstreaming of queer and feminist politics and increasing access to formal legal equality for gays and lesbians. While representations of gays and lesbians in literature, film, and popular cultures have multiplied and feminism has achieved a previously unimagined level of acceptance and popularity, vehement debates surround the question of where queer and feminist political energy should be directed and whether the transformative objectives of such politics have been left behind in favour of those which pursue forms of inclusion. Critiques of post-feminism by feminist scholars such as Angela McRobbie (2009) echo Lisa Duggan's (2002) notion of 'homonormativity', which describes the increasing complicity between institutionalized, domesticized homosexuality and neoliberal mechanisms of economic and social power. Likewise, Jasbir Puar (2007) has critiqued the ways in which rights discourses produce narratives of gender exceptionalism and what she calls 'homonationalism'. Such debates raise questions about the extent to which feminist and queer subjects can be presumed to be inherently political.

This dissertation intervenes in contemporary debates in queer and feminist politics through an analysis of literary fiction. Rather than focusing on formal equality mechanisms and discourses, its engagement with sexual politics is situated in the realm of affect and intimacy. Taking as its point of departure the second-wave feminist claim that personal and intimate transformation are at the heart of political transformation, this dissertation uses a seemingly anachronistic paradigm to critique linear narratives that position queerness and queer politics and theory in the present tense and lesbian feminism in the past. It argues that the utopian impulses of second-wave lesbian feminism overlap with those of contemporary queer politics, and claims that both foreground practices and conceptions of intimacy that mirror and prefigure broader social change.

Exploring the complex ways in which politics are enacted via intimacy, this dissertation takes as its object of study the figure of the lesbian in contemporary Anglo-American literature, specifically engaging with the fiction of Canadian writer Ann-Marie MacDonald. Situating the figure of the lesbian at the centre of this analysis signals a specific historical, political, and social context. The lesbian, as a figure or trope, or lesbian existence, as a way of *doing* feminism, offers a productive point of departure for such considerations because of the ways in which both have, over time, been variously and often simultaneously constructed as either the abject or idealized object of sexual and gender politics. Furthermore, lesbian feminism signals a specific temporal location and political function and holds a particular space in the feminist and queer imaginary. While exploring both the influence of queer theory and politics in the political and theoretical structures of sexuality, and the unprecedented mainstreaming both of (certain versions of) non-heterosexuality and (certain versions of) feminism, this dissertation's project is to consider the possibilities still generated by the figure of the lesbian and lesbian feminism, while considering its sometimes-uncomfortable relationship to the considerable influence of queer theory.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation ist in der zweiten Dekade des 21. Jahrhunderts verortet, genauer: im umkämpften Feld des heutigen *mainstreaming* queerer und feministischer Politiken bei gleichzeitig wachsenden Zugangsmöglichkeiten von Lesben und Schwulen zu formalrechtlicher Gleichstellung. Während die Repräsentationen von Schwulen und Lesben in Literatur, Film und populärer Kultur sprunghaft angestiegen sind und der Feminismus gleichzeitig ein zuvor unvorstellbares Niveau von Akzeptanz erreicht hat, finden vehemente Debatten um die Frage statt, worauf queere und feministische politische Energien zu richten wären und ob die transformativen Zielvorgaben solcher Politiken zugunsten solcher überwunden wurden, die Formen der Inklusion anstreben. So legte Jasbir Puar (2007) etwa offen, wie in Rechtsdiskurse ein „Homonationalismus" und Narrative eines Genderexzeptionalismus produziert werden. Ähnliche Kritiken des Post-Feminismus durch feministische Wissenschaftler_innen wie Angela McRobbie (2009) spiegeln Lisa Duggans (2002) Konzept von „Homonormativität" wider, das die Komplizenschaft von institutionalisierter domestizierter Homosexualität und neoliberalen Mechanismen von wirtschaftlicher und sozialer Macht beschreibt. Solche Debatten führen zu der Frage, in welchem Umfang die feministischen und queeren Subjekte im Zentrum dieser imaginierten Transformation als inhärent politisch vorausgesetzt werden können.

Vorliegende Dissertation greift in diese Debatten durch die Analyse von Gegenwartsliteratur ein. Statt sich mit formalen Gleichheitsmechanismen und -diskursen zu beschäftigen, ist ihr Interesse an sexuellen Politiken im Bereich von Affekt und Intimität situiert. Dafür geht die Arbeit von jener Überzeugung der zweiten Frauenbewegung aus, wonach im Zentrum politischer Veränderungen stets persönliche Veränderungen stehen, und benutzt damit ein scheinbar anachronistisches Paradigma, um solche Narrative zu kritisieren, die Queerness sowie queere Politik und Theorie im Präsens, lesbischen Feminismus dagegen in der Vergangenheit positionieren wollen (Hemmings 2009). Die Arbeit argumentiert, dass die utopischen Impulse des lesbischen Feminismus der zweiten Frauenbewegung sich mit aktueller queerer Politik überschneiden, und legt dar, dass beide auf unterschiedliche Art Praktiken und Konzepte von Intimität in den Vordergrund stellen, die auf soziale Veränderungen in größerem Maßstab verweisen.

Die Erkundung der komplexen Weisen, in denen Politik durch Intimität praktiziert wird, erfolgt hier am Beispiel der Figur der Lesbe in der zeitgenössischen Anglo-Amerikanischen Literatur, speziell in Auseinandersetzung mit der Literatur der kanadischen Schriftstellerin Ann-Marie MacDonald. Die Figur der Lesbe im Zentrum dieser Analyse zu positionieren, signalisiert einen spezifischen historischen und politischen Kontext. Die Lesbe als Figur sowie *lesbian existence* als eine feministische Praxis bieten einen produktiven Ausgangspunkt für diese Überlegungen, weil beide im Lauf der Zeit oft und teils simultan als das Abjekt oder das idealisierte Objekt von sexueller und Genderpolitik konstruiert worden sind. Des weiteren markiert lesbischer Feminismus einen bestimmten zeitlichen Ort sowie eine politische Funktion und besetzt einen bestimmten Platz im feministischen und queeren Imaginären. Aufgabe der Dissertation ist es damit, die Möglichkeiten herauszuarbeiten, die heute noch immer von der Figur der Lesbe und vom lesbischem Feminismus ausgehen, ohne dabei deren teils unbequeme Beziehung zum beachtlichen Einfluss der Queer Theory aus den Augen zu verlieren.

The Affective Temporalities of Intimacy: Lesbian Feminism and Contemporary Fiction

1 Introduction

1.1 Negotiating the Contemporary Politics of Intimacy

The second decade of the twenty-first century has been marked by a wave of equality laws furthering the rights of gays and lesbians and granting unprecedented access to institutions such as marriage and adoption. This political shift has been reflected in literature, film, and popular cultures, where representations of gays and lesbians have multiplied. Feminism, too, has achieved a previously unimagined level of mainstream popularity, ranging from public declarations by celebrities of their feminist identifications, to liberal feminist manifestos encouraging women to 'lean in'[1] and claim their place in the corporate world. These developments have been accompanied by vehement debates amongst queer and feminist scholars and activists about the capacity of such developments to enact meaningful political transformation. Jasbir Puar (2007), for example, has critiqued the ways in which rights discourses produce narratives of gender exceptionalism and what she calls 'homonationalism'. The treatment of women and LGBT subjects has become a marker of how progressive and civilized a state is to the extent that military interventions are justified in the name of furthering women's or LGBT rights.[2] Critiques of post-feminism by feminist

[1] In her 2013 book, *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg argues that the obstacles that women face are as much internal as external, and that the challenge of balancing family and career can be overcome through a willingness to work hard and be assertive. Sandberg's book has been widely criticized by feminists for the way that it ignores, for example, "the concrete systemic obstacles most women face inside the workforce" (hooks [sic]: 2013).

[2] What is now commonly known as 'pink-washing' allows countries such as Israel to project socially liberal policies in relation to sexuality that distract the international community from violent government actions. For more on this, see Jasbir Puar (2007): *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* and Sarah Schulman (2012): *Israel/Palestine and the Queer International*.

scholars such as Angela McRobbie (2009) echo Lisa Duggan's (2002) notion of 'homonormativity', which describes the increasing complicity between institutionalised, domesticized homosexuality and neoliberal mechanisms of economic and social power.

Objections to contemporary rights agendas are frequently based on the notion that such changes to the acquisition of individual rights (for instance to marriage) do not dismantle oppressive institutions, structures and processes of a society. For these critics, feminist and queer projects are empty without a fundamental agenda of transformation. Vital to these critiques is the argument that feminist and queer politics should aim to re-define societal norms and institutions, not to merely be included in them. This raises questions about the extent to which feminist and queer subjects at the heart of this imagined transformation can be considered to be inherently political. In this dissertation, I engage with these complex debates through an analysis of literary fiction. Rather than focusing explicitly on critiques of equality and rights discourses or interventions into political mechanisms, my aim is to engage with sexual politics by situating my analysis in the realm of affect and intimacy. At the heart of debates about rights, equality, and the presumed political aims of queer and feminist projects, lie fundamental questions about what we expect our intimate relationships to be, and what we want them to do or make possible.

From its earliest incarnations, the feminist movement made links between the personal and political spheres. Feminist interventions located the source of the wider subjugation of women in its most basic unit – the intimate relationship between a man and a woman. These early feminist claims can and have been criticized for many reasons, including their essentialist assumptions about what constitutes the category of woman, the exclusion of transgendered people and issues, and the privilege and whiteness out of which many of such analyses emerged. However, such interventions taught us that personal and intimate transformation are at the heart of any project of social transformation. In this

dissertation, I argue that this originary claim of feminism, articulated perhaps most explicitly by lesbian feminists, continues to have value.

Clare Hemmings (2011) has documented the ways in which the history of feminism has been narrated in a particular way. She describes how, even within feminism itself, a progressive logic privileges new paradigms, overemphasizing the shortcomings of, and thereby discarding, past moments. Alongside Hemmings, scholars such as Victoria Hesford, through her theorization of the "feminist-as-lesbian" (2013: 13), have shown the ways in which the early work of feminists has informed the central analyses and impulses of contemporary queer theory. Yet for both feminism and queer theory, lesbian feminism has taken on a specific characterization that has rendered its theories and politics redundant, unfashionable, or "anachronistic" (Freeman 2010: 8). In this dissertation, I argue against the teleological political grammar of linear narratives that position queerness and queer politics and theory in the present tense and lesbian feminism in the past. Instead, I understand the utopian impulses of second wave lesbian feminism as overlapping with those of contemporary queer politics. I claim that, in disparate ways, both foreground practices and conceptions of intimacy that mirror and prefigure broader social changes.

Exploring the complex ways in which we attempt to enact politics via intimacy, this dissertation takes as its object of study the figure of the lesbian in contemporary Anglo-American literature. In situating this figure at the of my analysis, I signal a specific historical, political, and social context. The lesbian, as a figure or trope, or lesbian existence, as a way of *doing* feminism, offers a productive point of departure for such considerations because of the ways in which both have, over time, been variously and often simultaneously constructed as either the abject or idealized object of sexual and gender politics. Furthermore, lesbian feminism signals a specific temporal location and political function, and holds a particular space in the feminist and queer imaginary.

As I will discuss in more depth in Chapter Three, lesbian feminists, and importantly, lesbian women of colour, were responsible for broadening the scope of what the movement should aim to achieve. However, in striving for mainstream recognition, many feminists worried that including lesbian issues in the feminist agenda would not only distract from what they considered to be more vital issues, but confirm the conflation of lesbianism with feminism. This inaugurated a stereotype that continues to the present day, of the feminist as a man-hating, humourless, and unattractive lesbian. Similarly, in scholarly contexts, lesbian feminism has come to represent a moment of error in feminist history, associated with essentialism, racism, identitarianism, and separatism. The dismissive positioning of lesbian feminism in this way forms part of a bid not only for mainstream acceptance, but for realisation through queer theory's new intellectual paradigm. While I explore both the influence of queer theory and politics in the political and theoretical structures of sexuality, and the unprecedented mainstreaming both of (certain versions of) non-heterosexuality and (certain versions of) feminism, my project in this dissertation is to consider the possibilities still generated by the figure of the lesbian. I engage with the work that feminism has done through psychoanalytic theory and theories of affect and temporality, while considering its sometimes uncomfortable relationship to the considerable influence of queer theory.

1.2 Public Intimacies, Private Politics

In mobilizing a term such as 'intimacy', or the literal and symbolic domains of the 'public' and 'private', one inevitably invokes an overwhelming profusion of intellectual, historical, and political traditions. Intimacy in particular, as that which has been understood as imbuing our lives with meaning – indeed as that out of which we make a life at all – bears an immense burden. Positioned alternately as evacuated of the material and political forces of the public

sphere, and as the primary site for the production – and hence disruption – of social power, intimacy is a complex repository of expectation, affect, and meaning. Lauren Berlant writes that

> intimacy builds worlds and it creates spaces and usurps places meant for other kinds of relation. Its potential failure to stabilize closeness always haunts its persistent activity, making the very attachments deemed to buttress a life seem in a state of constant, if latent, vulnerability. (2000: 2)

Berlant's intervention points to the optimistic, even utopian, potential of intimacy as well as to its inherent instability. This instability is related not only to experiences and practices of intimacy, but also to the conceptual and imaginative frameworks through which we attempt to make sense of them. In this project, I understand intimacy as being related to what Berlant here refers to as "closeness". More specifically, I consider intimacy as bound to spaces of proximity – to those physical, emotional, and imagined spaces between bodies that become densely laden with affect. The title of this dissertation introduces this affective linkage of intimacy and proximity. Throughout my analysis, I explore intimacies as *affective temporalities*, claiming that they are constituted by affective encounters forged and sustained within particular spatial and temporal contexts. Likewise, I understand time, space, and feeling as being reciprocally constituted by intimate relations and encounters. The singular experience that one individual has with another is bound to, and made meaningful by, the time and space within which it takes place. The affect carried by each person into an encounter, and indeed the affect held by the space within which that encounter occurs, determines and shapes the possibilities, boundaries, and intensities of the intimacies created. In thinking about intimacy as an affective temporality, I am referring not only to a proximity of bodies brought together in time and space, but also to a proximity of affects – that is, the alignment or sympathetic orientation of feeling. Thus, feeling *with* someone; or, orienting

one's feeling *in the same direction* as them, might serve as a way of forging and confirming intimacy. Intimacy does not always produce what we desire or expect. Even when it does it is always, in a sense, haunted by instability and impermanence. Intimacies can be chaotic, ambivalent, incoherent and painful. They may also be personally, and even politically, transformative.

The domains of public and private spaces inform the majority of considerations of intimacy.[3] Within the context of this dissertation, I think about the public and private domains of intimacy through the more historically and politically specific terms 'personal' and 'political'. To consider the transformative potential of intimacy through a problematization of the 'personal' in relation to the 'political' has been among feminism's most significant interventions. Indeed, Carol Pateman claims that "the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle; it is, ultimately, what the feminist movement is about" (1989: 118). For Eli Zaretsky, it is "the unique and world historical achievement" of the women's movement to have exposed "the social nature of the family, the 'public' nature of the 'private,' the internal connections that exist between the family and the economy" (1994: 206). Contemporary feminist politicizations of 'the personal' emerged as diverse reactions to a range of historical circumstances: from the rigid separate-sphere ideology of the nineteenth century (Warner 2014: 1) to the socio-political context of the post- World War II era post-World War II socio-political context, which Wendy Brown describes as a time of "profound political disorientation" (2001: 4). Both the women's movement and the gay liberation movement

[3] Historicizations of the public and private often centre on Jürgen Habermas, who in his seminal book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) defined the public sphere as that of private individuals who come together to form a public. Habermas charts the emergence of this sphere through language and philosophy beginning in the eighteenth century. Feminist and queer scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1985, 1992) and Michael Warner (1991) have critiqued Habermas for his lack of attention to gender and sexuality. Claiming that the bourgeois public sphere excludes marginalized groups, Fraser and later Warner theorized the notion of a 'counter public' whereby marginalized groups form their own public spheres.

had the political goal of transforming private life by attributing public relevance to it.[4] Disillusioned with the grand narratives of revolution and progress such as those offered by Marxism or Liberalism, and with the failure of such political paradigms to address the private realities of women, the early Women's Liberation Movement produced an analysis that tied the domestic, intimate oppression of women to their political and economic subjugation. According to Michael Warner, these public movements "represented groups who were by definition linked to a conventional understanding of private life – gender roles, sexuality, the home and family" (2014: 1). This signalled that "[a]n understanding of public and private was implied not just in their theories and policy platforms, but also in their very existence as movements" (ibid.).

Feminist interventions at this time took myriad forms: position papers, manifestos, books, and the formation of communities of women who attempted to live outside of what Radicalesbians called the "coercive identifications" of gender (2006 [1970]: 2). Three now-canonical texts that emerged out of this period are Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1978). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan described the "strange feeling of desperation" felt by the suburban housewife and mother as "the problem that has no name" (16). Whilst she has been critiqued for the multiple – raced, classed and sexualised – privileges implied by her argument, Friedan's work remains important for the ways in which it draws attention to the inherent dissatisfaction felt by many (if not all) women of this era, which seemed to be at odds with their material comfort. In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone took a different approach. Critiquing Marx and Engels, she claimed that instead of the economic, the

[4] Michael Warner writes that "[o]ther social movement, temperance, abolition, labor, suffrage, antiracism – had also challenged prevailing norms of public and private" (2014: 1). Warner gives the example of racial segregation in the American South, which was justified through the invocation of the legal entity of private property. He points out how stressing the public relevance of private life was necessary in order to counter this and advance the notion of 'civil rights'.

"psychosexual" (7) can be understood to be the is the primary dynamic of human history. For Firestone, all forms of social life could be traced back to the basic reproductive unit of the biological family, which she claimed was organized around a model of "dominance-submission" (45). According to Firestone's 'dialectic,' it was not capital that needed to be destroyed, but rather love as embodied by heterosexual relations. For Kate Millett, "politics" was defined by "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" through "techniques of control" (31). Romantic love is thus positioned as one such technique of control, and, like Firesmith, Millett understands sexual relations as "charged microcosms" for the production of social power (ibid.). In these and other early second wave struggles to make explicit the connection between the continuing oppression of women and institutions such as family life and heterosexuality, one finds traces of later theorizations such as Michel Foucault's definition of sexuality as a "dense transfer point for relations of power" (1990: 103) or Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of "family feelings" (1998: 68). However, Hesford suggests reading these second-wave formulations not as precursors to such analyses, but rather through the lens of what Walter Benjamin describes as a "blazing up" "from the past and from a different discursive domain (radical feminism as distinct from post-structuralism) that allows us to see, in a flash, a connection between the two" (2013: 169). Understanding second wave feminism in this way allows us to avoid the generational logic that places feminism and queer theory in progression, positioning one as surpassing the other. Instead, Hesford argues that "early second wave contestations of marriage, family life, and compulsory heterosexuality created the conditions of possibility for queer critiques of heteronormativity and offer us, in the present, a memory of another refusal to view marriage and intimacy as the site and source of a pre-political human happiness and freedom" (2009: 8).

Within the fields of feminist and queer studies, a wide range of contemporary debates

and publications demonstrates the continuing interrogations of the epistemologies and politics of intimacy and the negotiation of boundaries between the domains of personal and political. Berlant's concept of "intimate public spheres" (1997), and her edited collection *Intimacy* (2000), inaugurated a critical interest in intimacy within the humanities and social sciences. Susanne Lenon, Susanne Luhmann and Nathan Rambukkana (2015) point out the wide range of new vocabularies that describe forms of intimacy that have emerged out of such scholarship. In her exploration of "emotional capitalism […], a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other", sociologist Eva Illouz coined the term "cold intimacies" (2007: 5). Sonja Mackenzie's 2013 analysis of HIV/AIDS within Black communities provoked her notion of "structural intimacies", which interrogates intimate justice and the connections between intimate lives and structural patterns. Theresa Senft describes the "familiarity that arises from exchanging private information with people from whom we are otherwise remote" (2011: 7) through social media as "strange intimacies."

The early feminist interventions into the 'personal and political' that I describe above emerged out of a specific social and political context. This is also the case with contemporary analyses and politicizations of love and intimacy. While a central concern of the early Women's Liberation Movement was to bring political attention to the personal, today the realm of the personal, or what we might call the intimate sphere, has become a domain of active depoliticization. Berlant and Warner (1998), for example, claim that in the contemporary North American context, love, particularly as it is manifested in monogamous heterosexuality and the family, has become a 'pre-political' refuge from the public sphere and politics. Romantic love is perhaps the most recognized and most salient form of

intimacy. It has been theorized as a form of social control and reproduction[5] via the modern institutions of marriage, romantic love, and "coupledom" (Kipnis 2003: 15). The work of scholars such as Illouz and Kipnis politicizes and scrutinizes the role of love and intimacy in the reproduction of late capitalist, neoliberal society. Such diverse and generative theoretical examinations of the social and political functions of love, intimacy, personal and political form the basis for the analysis set forth in this dissertation. My specific focus is on how these interrogations and framings work formally within literary texts.

1.3 Literary Intimacies

Avery Gordon writes that the fictive "is an ensemble of cultural imaginings, affective experiences, animated objects, marginal voices, narrative densities, and eccentric traces of power's presence" (1997: 25). Here, Gordon expresses literature's potential for discursive and imaginative explorations of the complex constellations of intimacy and politics. Scholars such as Hesford have described how the women of feminism's second wave used fiction and autobiography as a "means of creating a feminist public and exploring the goals and aspirations of feminism" (2009: 13). Genres such as memoir and science fiction, for example, provided women writers with the opportunity for self-representation and for conceiving of new, utopian worlds based upon their political aspirations and ideals. Beyond this, however, in the early years of the Women's Liberation Movement, literature was not only understood as a means of self-representation or invention, but as having genuine transformative power. June Arnold, for example, claims that the novel "will lead to, or *is* revolution". For Arnold, "women's art is politics" in that it has "the means to change

[5] In her book *Desire/Love* (2012), Berlant identifies the key distinctions between desire and love, drawing her understandings first from psychoanalytic theory and then from mass market cultural forms, both of which, she says, are in the business of documenting love and its forms. In contrast to desire, Berlant writes, "love is the embracing dream in which desire is reciprocated: rather than being isolating, love provides an image of an expanded self, the normative version of which is the two-as-one intimacy of the couple form" (6).

women's minds" (1995: xix, emphasis in original). Literature continues to give voice to those intimate experiences and practices that emerge less easily out of theoretical or intellectual contexts. In this dissertation, I examine the ways in which the complex negotiation of politics and intimacy is constructed by and emerges from literary texts, specifically through the textual presence of lesbianism. I am interested not only in what these novels have to say *about* intimacy, but in *how* they say it. I examine how literary techniques are employed to describe and represent scenes of intimacy and, furthermore, how these literary techniques produce intimate reading encounters. The edited collection *Scenes of Intimacy: Reading, Writing and Theorizing Contemporary Literature* (2013) uses the language of theatre to frame the representation of textual intimacies as "scenes". As Jennifer Cooke points out in her introduction to the book, some of these scenes are more predictable than others, and have familiar "scripts". However, she claims, literature more frequently reflects the "unanticipated and unscripted" nature of the scenes within which intimacy is played out (7). Cooke's description connects textual intimacy to affect, writing that the reading encounter

> is an event with a diverse potential for dramatic effects upon a reader who is embodied rather than just a structural receptor: a text can shame us, disgust us, shock us or move us and such reactions are not merely abstract. We may blush, cry, grimace or smile in reaction to what we read, as the body becomes the stage upon which our emotional responses play themselves out. (ibid.)

Across my readings of literary texts in this dissertation, I find affect located not only in the individual text or reader, but also in the space of intimacy created between them. Following Cooke's assertion that "[a]cademically attentive close reading is one form of intimate engagement with the text" (ibid.), I understand my own analyses reflexively, as affective and intimate encounters with texts. These encounters are inevitably influenced by my

attachments to and investments in not only the texts themselves, but the politics through which, and for which, I read them.

1.4 Lesbian Figures and Figurations

In 1981, Bonnie Zimmerman wrote that "lesbian criticism continues to be plagued with the problem of definition" (2009 [1981]: 44). In 2002, Annamarie Jagose began her book *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual* with the question, "why is the problem of lesbianism so frequently a problem of representation?" (1). Perhaps most emphatically, in 1990, Judith Butler asked "What qualifies as a lesbian? Does anyone know?" (127). The opacity of the category 'lesbian' is not made easier to navigate by the fundamental instability of the category 'woman'. While lesbian's definitional resistance is in part due to the complexity such definitions hold when applied to identity categories, it might more specifically relate to the lesbian's historical double-burden of invisibility, as both non-heterosexual and non-male. Attempts to resolve this question have been taken up by a number of scholars, indeed perhaps even by all of the scholars who engage with lesbianism at all, their approaches to answering it ranging from the psychoanalytic to the postmodern, the historiographic to the literary.

My goal in this dissertation is not to resolve the complex terminological debates surrounding lesbian representation, nor to answer the question, *what is a lesbian*. Instead, I attend to both the genesis of, as well as the work facilitated by, lesbianism in contemporary literary texts. I utilize two primary frameworks for conceiving of lesbianism: 'the figure of the lesbian', and 'lesbian existence'. I find these two paradigms useful because of the ways in which they attend both to the specificity and the diffuseness of the relationships represented across the literary texts taken up in the following chapters. Not demanding that

a singular definition contain both "the ontological state of simply being a lesbian, whatever that might come to mean, and an ethicopolitical state wherein lesbian designates something like a progressive emancipatory, or liberatory politics" (Villajero 2003: 5) facilitates a more flexible approach to the intimacies that emerge in the novels that I analyse across this dissertation. These intimacies are sometimes, but not always, explicitly sexual, and appear in diverse manifestations. However, I argue that what they have in common is how they work to produce unexpected effects and affect around what I frame as times and spaces of rupture.

For Imogen Tyler, "figure" describes "the ways in which at different historical and cultural moments specific social types become overdetermined and are publicly imagined (and figured) in excessive, distorted, and caricatured ways (2008: 18).[6] Tyler claims that the "emergence of such figures is always expressive of an underlying social crisis or anxiety" (ibid.). Taking up and expanding upon Tyler's claim, I ask not only what particular social crises or anxieties accumulate around the figure of the lesbian, but how they are surprisingly resolved or transformed by her presence in a text. For Donna Haraway, figures are always "material, semiotic and psychic" (1997: 11). This way of thinking about figures lends itself well to my analysis, as it points to the ways in which the 'figure of the lesbian' not only signifies the lesbian at the level of embodiment, or even representation, but also elicits the meanings that attach to and are produced within the process of her figuration. Claudia Castañeda, whose work focuses on the figure of the child, writes that a figure

> [i]s the simultaneously material and semiotic effect of specific practices. Understood as figures, […] particular categories of existence can also be considered in terms of

[6] Tyler's work examines figures in the UK media, particularly the ways in which the affect of disgust works to figure the "chav", "a term of intense class-based abhorrence" that is associated with stereotypical notions of the lower-class. (Haywood and Yar 2006: 16). Tyler describes her approach as "zoom[ing] in on" figuration "not only as a representational (in a more structuralist sense) but in a constitutive and generative process" (2008: 18).

> their uses – what they "body forth" in turn. Figuration is thus understood here to incorporate a double force: constitutive effect and generative circulation. (2002: 3)

Castañeda, like Haraway, upon whose work she builds, describes figures as both constitutive and generative. She draws attention both to the more straightforward representational function of figures, and to the ways in which figures themselves produce and transmit meaning. For both of these theorists, figures emerge out of historical and social practices and are constituted and reconstituted via repetition and circulation. This is key to the way that I understand the figure of the lesbian as operating within literary texts, whereby she takes on different meanings and functions depending on the context within which she is located. Theorizations of figures such as Hesford's "feminist-as-lesbian" (2013: 13) or Sara Ahmed's "feminist killjoy" (2010: 240) do the work of imbuing feminism and feminists with bad affect. Such negative figurations arise out of complex historical and political processes such as, for example, feminism's own disavowal of lesbian feminism, or mainstream backlash against feminist progress. Each of the three novels around which I build my main argument are set in a different historical period, and Haraway and Castañeda's attention to the emergence of figures out of specific historical practices and paradigms is particularly useful for my consideration of the temporal contingence of the figure of the lesbian's signification.

This connects to another useful theorization of figures, that they must not necessarily directly signify that which they represent. For Haraway, a figure is always "tropic", a word that she defines as indicating the symbiosis of the literal and figurative, the semiotic and material. Likewise, in *Madness and Civilization* (2006 [1961]: 8), Foucault gives the examples of the madman, the leper, and the *Narrenchiff* to demonstrate how figures emerge out of societal practices, describing them as objects or identities that occupy privileged positions within imaginary landscapes. Foucault claims that such figures *exceed* the subject

from which they emerge, both in terms of temporality and representation (ibid.). Again, in Foucault's account, figures are, even if historically and politically situated, always exaggerated in some sense. Figures become, among other things, "aesthetic encounter[s] with forms of representation" (Huffer 2010: 54), as will become clear in my examination of literary constructions of the figure of the lesbian. Theorizations of figuration such as the ones described above frame it as exceeding the scope of representational practice. This has to do, in part, with the complex imbrication of figuration with affect, which I will attend to more closely in Chapter Two.

It is at the moment that affect attaches to a figure that it acquires meaning. Understanding – via William Miller – emotion as "feelings mediated and affects animated" (2008: 19), Tyler claims that "[t]he idea that emotions are animating is a useful way of analysing how figures are brought to life and endowed with affect through mediation" (ibid.). For Tyler, such mediations explain why "figures are often communicated in highly emotive ways" (ibid.). This elaboration of the affective life of figures is useful for the analysis set forth in my dissertation, as I read the figure of the lesbian as both animating and being animated by affect. For example, as discussed above and in more detail in later chapters, the lesbian has been a polarizing figure particularly within feminist politics. Sara Ahmed theorizes affect as something that *sticks* to certain figures. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), she reads novels and films including *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), *Bend it Like Beckham* (2002), and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) to elaborate a cluster of figures whom she names "the feminist killjoy", "the unhappy queer", "the angry black woman", and "the melancholic migrant". She describes these figures as being burdened by, or placed in opposition to, those objects or social ideals attributed with positive affect.

Puar, alongside other scholars such as Amit Rai (2002), uses figuration to explore

sexuality and nationalism, connecting it to affect and queerness through the analysis of terrorist corporealities. In her seminal book, *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), Puar claims that that the liberal incorporation of certain queer subjects into the fold of the nation state relies upon the production of perversely sexualized and racialized terrorist figures. For Ahmed, Puar, and Rai, it is the mobilization of figures for social and political ends that becomes key to their significance. I find Puar's work on homonationalism particularly useful in analysing contemporary debates around the increasing formal legal equality of women, gays, and lesbians. The deployment of figures is likewise central to the work of Lee Edelman, who in *No Futures: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004) claims that "[p]olitics never rests on essential identities. It centres, instead, on the figurality that is always essential to identity, and thus on the figural relations in which social identities are always inscribed" (17). Mapping the Lacanian death drive onto queerness, and "reproductive futurism" (3) onto the figure of the Child, Edelman positions these figures in opposition to one another in order to demonstrate the ways in which figures are put to political use.

My approach to figuration turns to and builds upon the methods of these scholars in order to interrogate the position of the lesbian in the literary archive. I employ figuration because it allows me to think about the figure of the lesbian as neither singularly literal nor mimetic, but rather as emerging from a complex interplay of social, political and historical influences that are in the continuous process of constituting and reconstituting meaning around the figure and the work that she does within particular literary contexts.

1.5 Lesbian Existence

Alongside understanding the lesbian as a *figure* within a literary text, the second paradigm

through which I understand lesbian representation in my dissertation is Adrienne Rich's concept of *lesbian existence.* In Rich's canonical article, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1979), which was written within the context of the early Women's Liberation Movement that I described above, she coined the term "compulsory heterosexuality" to articulate the way that heterosexuality functions not as a preference or an orientation, but rather as "an ideological regime maintained by a complex web of cultural, economic, and psychological forces intended to maintain male supremacy" (1980 [1979]: 637). In the place of "lesbian", Rich suggests the concept of a "lesbian continuum", invoking an array of affective, rather than solely erotic, women-identified experiences: "forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (192). "Lesbian existence," then, politicizes relationships between women as being at the core of resistance to male domination. I find this concept meaningful not only for the ubiquitousness of the forms of intimacy that it describes in my primary texts but precisely for what might be perceived as its 'out-of-datedness' in an era of queerness.

Critics of Rich's notion of a "lesbian continuum" have objected to its perceived desexualisation of lesbian identity, arguing that it is erotic desire that distinguishes lesbianism from other forms of intimacy such as friendship. Heather Love refers to this in her review "A Gentle Angry People" (2000), writing that "[t]his vision of lesbian beatitude […] led to a great deal of social transformation. But it also led to a culture of lesbianism – or 'lesbian feminism' – that many women came to find rigid, narrow, and cloying" (104). Other critics claim that the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" denies heterosexual women agency and implies that all heterosexual relations further patriarchy. The framing of lesbianism as inherently political is criticized as an essentialist claim that that all lesbians resist patriarchy. Hesford suggests reading Rich's text as performative, not descriptive, an

approach that I too take up. Hesford writes:

> Concepts like the 'lesbian continuum', therefore, should be read, not as an attempt to *describe* the historicity of the experiential reality of women, or indeed, of lesbian, but as an attempt to *produce* that history […] our questions of Rich's text should be, not 'is this lesbianism?' or 'is this feminism?' But what are the forms of relationship and community being articulated in Rich's conception of lesbianism, and how do they help us think differently about feminism, women, and their place in the world. (2005: 243)

While I agree that Rich's expansion of the scope of lesbian identity can be critiqued for its potential to desexualise lesbianism, and can be problematic in terms of its openness to being used for essentializing discourses, I use it in part explicitly *because* of these connotations. In an alternative to Rich's formulation, Judith Bennett's useful notion of "lesbian-like" describes those "women whose lives might have particularly offered opportunities for same-sex love; women who resisted norms of feminine behaviour based on heterosexual marriage; women who lived in circumstances that allowed them to nurture and support other women" (2000: 4). Despite the availability of alternatives such as Bennett's, I choose to remain with Rich's construction because of its connection to a particular historical and political moment. While Bennett's "lesbian-like" could be seen as evading the gender essentialism implied by Rich's "lesbian continuum," I find Rich's concept pertinent for its ability to identify the different registers across which lesbianism operates, and its attention to the very "forms of relationship and community among women" that I explore in the literary works that appear in my dissertation. Furthermore, I understand it as linked to contemporary queer understandings of gender and sexuality that have been positioned as surpassing the positionality of Rich's argument. Thus, in my dissertation, my explicit use of "lesbian existence" has the double function of reclamation and functionality.

1.6 Queer Theory and Lesbian Invisibility

If the term 'lesbian' has been 'plagued' with definitional problems, the term 'queer' has embraced them, indeed has actively resisted epistemological stability. A reclaimed term, it variously signifies strangeness, the abject, the homophobic, and most recently, the intellectual and political paradigm of "Queer Theory". As a "discipline which refuses to be disciplined" (Sullivan 2003: v), queer theory has nevertheless gained a significant institutional foothold, usurping its predecessor Gay and Lesbian Studies. Love writes: "While old school lesbian studies remained institutionally marginal, chronically underfunded throughout the 1970s and 1980s, queer theory, with its Foucauldian pedigree, its critique of identity politics, had an easier go of it" (2000: 102). Queerness has come to signify a number of identities and practices. Indeed, as Jagose claims: "It seems everyone knows – or no one much cares – what queer means these days" (2015: 26). However, while critiquing the propensity of 'queer' to signify both everything and nothing, Jagose points out one definitional continuity, that queer is commonly understood to mean "antinormative" (ibid.). Indeed, David Eng claims that "the critique of the normative" is that which "we might describe as queer studies' most important epistemic as well as political promise" (2010: 193), and in David Halperin's words, queer is "by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant" (1997: 62). Its institution into disciplinarity has provoked critiques from those who suggest, firstly, that queer itself becomes the term under "sustained and confounding normalization" (Wiegman 2012: 305), or, secondly, that queer theory, having "oppose[d] 'the master's house'", begins to resemble "the house that screams for dismantling" (Garber 2001: 4). If, in Nikki Sullivan's words, queer begins to function "as a new, and less wordy, label for an old box" (2003: 44) it must, in Judith Butler's, be

"redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes" (1993: 19).[7]

Butler's work, particularly her theorization of gender as performative, has been immensely influential in shaping the discipline of queer theory. Drawing from a number of sources, ranging from J.L. Austin's speech-act theory to Simone de Beauvoir's articulation of the learned nature of femininity, Foucault's theorizing of sexuality, Joan Riviere's understanding of "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929), and the subcultures of drag performance and butch-femme, Butler argues that rather than being inherently natural or innate, gender is a social construct that does particular kinds of work to reinforce oppressive regimes. She writes: "[I]dentity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures, or as the rallying points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression" (1990: 13–14). Following de Lauretis' inauguration of the term "Queer Theory" at a conference in 1991, a commitment to resisting the normative continued to be a commonality across the discipline's foundational texts.[8] Jagose scrutinizes the reason for this enshrinement of antinormativity as a foundation of queer theory, writing: "To put it simply, via its claim of antinormativity, queer theory afforded a sustainable platform for a critical and activist attention to sex that was not bound to the logics of identity politics" (2015: 32). Queer theory's critique of normativity, and project of imagining modes of being and of connection outside of normative structures, is fundamental to the analysis set forth in the following chapters.

[7] If queer theory can be understood as having an origin story, it might be most intelligibly located in Teresa de Lauretis' coining of the phrase in 1991 as a title for a special issue of the journal *differences*. In her choice, de Lauretis intended to differentiate queer from Lesbian and Gay Studies. Claiming that "lesbian and gay" frequently presumed white, middle-class, masculinity, de Lauretis wished to call attention to "the differences internal to homosexuality, [...] particularly to notably racial differences" (Jagose 2015: 28). While de Lauretis did not offer a precise definition of 'queer', she inaugurated it as a register of theory, one attentive to intersectionality, "to race and its attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location" (1991: viii).

[8] See, for example, Lisa Duggan (1995); Alexander Doty (1993); Michael Warner (1993); and David Halperin (1995).

De Lauretis's inaugural conception of queer theory was, above all, one anchored in futurity and in the wishful project of "rethink[ing] the sexual in new ways, elsewhere and otherwise" (1991: xvi). An echo of this can be found in José Esteban Muñoz's articulation of queer utopias in *Cruising Utopia* (2009):

> We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalising rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there* [...] we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is the longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough. (1)

It is in this utopian impulse, found both in the foundational objective of de Lauretis, and the more contemporary vision of Muñoz, that I see the trace of lesbian feminism. As one of the foundational scholars of queer theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, writes: "Queer can refer to: the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't* be made) to signify monolithically" (1994: 8). Recounting her mentor Sedgwick's understanding of the term, Maggie Nelson writes:

> She wanted the term to be a perpetual excitement, a kind of place-holder – a nominative […] willing to designate molten or shifting parts, a means of asserting while also giving the slip. That is what reclaimed terms do – the retain, they insist on retaining a sense of the fugitive. (2015: 36)

I understand queerness, at its best, as a descriptor for the diversity of intimacies and encounters and the ways in which they transform us. In the next section, I explore how lesbianism as a site of literary production has also retained, and can continue to retain, what Nelson calls "a sense of the fugitive". If 'queer' was the word to be reclaimed in the early

1990s, persistently and violently associated as it had been until then with pathologization and homophobia, the term 'lesbian' has never transcended its marginalizing designation, its disavowal concretized even more fully in the years of queer theory's celebration than before them.

1.7 Defining Lesbian Literature

The endemic definitional debates that mark scholarship on lesbianism are similarly fraught within the context of lesbian representation, making it difficult to specify the boundaries of what one might call 'lesbian literature'. I find this ambiguity productive, the diversity of the lesbian literary archive making it a fruitful point of departure for my analysis of intimacy. The literary is less burdened with the expectation of rigour, and is thus able to facilitate explorations and debates about the very terms in question. Rather than attempting to resolve such debates about terminology, my dissertation embraces the definitional instability of the lesbian, not only acknowledging, but working upon, the textual resistance to concrete terminology that characterizes the novels it explores.

Much of the scholarship on lesbian representation has been influenced by Terry Castle's seminal book *The Apparitional Lesbian* (1993). Writing that "[w]hen it comes to lesbians […] many people have trouble seeing what's in front of them" (3), Castle claims that in Western literature and film, erotic love between women has taken a "ghostly" form. Aiming to "bring the lesbian back into focus", Castle writes that "[t]he lesbian is never with us […] but always somewhere else" (ibid.). Alongside and following Castle, numerous

studies have attended to the absence of legible lesbian representation in earlier periods.[9] In her 2003 anthology *The Literature of Lesbianism*, Castle notes the importance of dramatic shifts at particular points in history, for example the sixteenth century, when "female same-sex love [became] more and more visible as a Western cultural preoccupation" (11). According to Castle, new developments, such as the publication of translations of classical writings such as Sappho's fragments, "brought female homosexuality back into view" (13). According to Sharon Marcus in her book *Between Women* (2007), much of the scholarly work investigating the presence of lesbianism in earlier time periods has engaged with the category of female friendship.

The relationship between lesbians and literature is not limited to the discursive construction of lesbianism within literary representation. In her introduction to lesbian literature, Jodie Medd refers to "literary scenes – of reading, writing, and critique […]" (2015: 4). Medd provides a genealogy of "library encounters," describing the abundance of fictional and autobiographical accounts of lesbians, ranging from science fiction writer Joanna Russ to anthropologist and gender/sexual theorist Gayle Rubin, to cartoonist Alison Bechdel, who "represents her coming out at the close of 1979 as a scene of reading: pictured as a college student reading *Word is Out* […] while standing at a bookshelf, Bechdel recalls the 'afternoon I realized, in the campus bookstore, that I was a lesbian'" (5). As Medd points out here, the history of lesbianism itself is deeply entangled with the material and theoretical world of books. In "What Has Never Been: An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism" (1981), Bonnie Zimmerman was one of the first to ask questions such as: "Does a woman's

[9] Further sources attending to the history of lesbianism and literature include Emma Donoghue (1993): *Passions Between Women: British Lesbian Culture 1668 – 1801*; Ruth Vanita (1996): *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination*; Patricia Juliana Smith (1997): *Lesbian Panic: Homoeroticism in Modern British Women's Fiction*; Laura Doan (2000): *Fashioning Sapphism: The Origins of a Modern English Lesbian Culture*; Harriette Andreadis (2001): *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550 – 1714*.

sexual and affectional preference influence the way she writes, reads, and thinks? [...] Is there a lesbian aesthetic distinct from a feminist aesthetic? [...] Can lesbian feminists develop insights into female creativity that might enrich all literary criticism?" (2009 [1981]: 40). Zimmerman's interrogative framework here encapsulates the task that I framed above as significant in lesbian scholarship more generally: the necessity to begin with a question. It is not only critics who take on this task. Contemporary lesbian writers have also begun not only to ask the very questions that Zimmerman and others introduce, but to work the mode of questioning into literary form.

1.8 Ann-Marie MacDonald

My analysis in this dissertation is grounded in close readings of contemporary Canadian author Ann-Marie MacDonald's three novels, *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003), and *Adult Onset* (2014), which are positioned within a broader genealogy of queer-feminist fiction. I focus on literary texts published from the 1980s because of my interest in the ways in which lesbian feminism and lesbianism were made meaningful in the early second wave movement and specifically how this was, and continues to be, manifested in literary fiction. Each chapter of close reading in this dissertation focuses on one of MacDonald's novels. Although best known for her works of fiction, MacDonald is also a prolific playwright, actor, and television host. Some of her other literary works include the plays *Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet)* (1988), *The Arab's Mouth* (1990), *The Attic, the Pearls, and Three Fine Girls* (1995), *Belle Moral* (2004), an opera libretto *Nigredo Hotel* (1992), and the book and lyrics for the musical *Anything That Moves* (2000). In addition, MacDonald hosted seven seasons of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) documentary program *Life and Times* and eight seasons of its flagship documentary

series *Doc Zone*. Some of her film and television appearances include roles in *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* (1987), and *The L Word* (2004 – 2009).

My focus on MacDonald comes firstly from her oeuvre's situatedness in a period of time – spanned by her three novels – that has seen increasing equality in social and political terms. Rather than examining her work through the specific lens of Canadian literary studies, I position her Canadian-ness as something that moves between British and American literary formations. Finally, and most importantly, I am drawn into and provoked by her engagement with topics that are at the heart of this project: war, trauma, the domestic sphere, and myriad forms of intimacy, particularly among women. Through MacDonald's texts I explore the connections between affect and literary form, examining how intimacies are produced and circulate within and beyond the text.

1.9 Conclusion

The first three chapters of this dissertation provide the historical, theoretical, political, and literary background for my interventions. These are followed by three close readings which are structured around a series of what I frame as 'ruptures'. I begin with a historical novel whose World War I setting locates it straightforwardly within this framework. I end with a novel set within the contemporary context of mainstream acceptance and formal legal equality and a period less easily understood as one of 'rupture.' I argue, however, that both its rapid onset and the way that it necessitates a renegotiation of identity, politics, and intimate relationships, produces an affect of disorientation that forces its characters and readers to consider such 'progressive' transformations as rupturing of other forms of intimacy, connection and political existence. Structuring my examination of literary texts through the notion of 'rupture' allows for an exploration of the ways in which intimacy

transforms not only individuals, but also the time and space within which they are located, in unexpected ways. Furthermore, I ask how intimacy creates spaces for private political negotiation even if it is not necessarily attached to outright political transformation.

In Chapter Two, I situate my dissertation's interventions within the theoretical framings of affect, queer temporalities, and trauma. I take into account the theoretical and philosophical lineages of those first two concepts, which historically have also been explored through categories such as emotion, feeling, and time, and locate my particular approach within the specific contemporary feminist and queer conceptions of affect and temporality. In elaborating upon these two distinct areas I also highlight the ways in which they intersect, in order to set out my dissertation's particular usage of what I will call 'affective temporalities'. I claim that although affect has been taken up across a number of disciplines, there has been less scholarly work on its specific function in literature. My theoretical and historical framing of affect in Chapter Two, then, provides the background for some of the central questions of this dissertation: Where does one locate affect? What is the relationship between temporality and affect within a text? How is affect transmitted and how do affects circulate between the reader and text? This chapter provides the basis for my close readings of MacDonald's work, through which I aim to theorize affect as it specifically relates to literary form.

The third section of Chapter Two traces some of the key concepts and developments within the broad field of trauma studies. I pay particular attention to feminist investments in, attachments to, and influences upon, contemporary theories of and responses to trauma. Likewise, I consider the impact of trauma theory on feminist thought and politics, specifically through the practice of feminist therapy and the notion of 'therapeutic culture'. I attend to the question of why, in literary texts, the lesbian is so frequently located in proximity to violence as well as to how the fragmentary and belated nature of traumatic

memory are represented in, and enacted through, narrative structures and devices. I propose that works of lesbian fiction frequently reproduce a linear account of abuse, repression, and recovery through formal aspects of the text. Finally, through a discussion of theorizations of trauma's insidious and punctual forms, I provide the basis for my reading of MacDonald's complication of the boundaries between intimate and public trauma.

If, in Chapter Two, I question why the lesbian is so frequently located in proximity to trauma, in Chapter Three, I ask how and why she has been historically located in proximity to utopia. I discuss a range of historical and theoretical propositions of the utopian potential of lesbianism, ranging from Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva's Lacanian accounts of the lesbian as exceeding the Symbolic space of patriarchy, to the more material and political positionings of radical feminists in the 1970s and 1980s. Bringing these into dialogue with Chapter Two's theorizations of trauma, the second half of Chapter Three discusses the ways in which lesbian texts published from the 1970s onward often figured lesbian existence as an alternative to, and a means of escaping, what they frame as the traumatic structures and relations of intimacy under patriarchy.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six are dedicated to close readings of MacDonald's three novels. In Chapter Four, I argue that through experimentation with literary form, MacDonald challenges the boundaries between public and private trauma and paradoxically constructs the time and space of war as capable of opening up, rather than closing down, intimacy. This chapter introduces some of MacDonald's major themes: childhood, memory, lesbian sexuality, female intimacies, language, and trauma. Through my reading of *Fall on Your Knees*, I explore some of the questions posed in the earlier, more theoretical and historically based chapters. For example: How is traumatic memory represented through narrative form? How is affect produced within a text and transmitted to the reader? How do intimate female spaces constructed by the temporality of wartime work to 'queer' the heteronormativity of

family structures?

In Chapter Five, I examine MacDonald's second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*, reading the family at its centre as representing the post-WWII re-consolidation of Canadian national identity. I analyse the role of story-telling within the novel, arguing that it demonstrates the performative and discursive nature of familial and national structures. Through an examination of Madeleine, the novel's protagonist, I ask what the implications are for those who do not affectively or materially align with these larger ideological projects. Through the frameworks of Adrienne Rich's notion of 'lesbian existence', and feminist therapeutic cultures, I consider Madeleine's experience of sexual abuse. I explore the reparative function of her relationship with three women in her life: her mother, her girlfriend, and her therapist. The evocative intimacies narrated by MacDonald are at odds with the traumatic events that unfold as the novel progresses. This chapter asks: What is the significance of this tension and how does one reconcile the inextricability of intimacy's pleasures and dangers? How does the juxtaposition of formal beauty with violent content make us complicit in trauma's disconcerting proximity? How are private intimacies found to be embedded in national structures of pride and disavowal?

In Chapter Six, I offer the dissertation's final close analysis. The scene of *Adult Onset* departs from the states of rupture represented in the earlier novels, whose scenes of national violence were more recognisable as unsteady forces in the protagonists' lifecycles. In Chapter Six, I argue that *Adult Onset* is also embedded in a space of rupture, which is perhaps more paradoxical, and the recognition of which we might want to resist: contemporary queer progress. Like those literary works that emerged out of and responded to, the contexts of early feminist politics and theory, *Adult Onset* demonstrates a continued investment in engaging with, and narrativizing, the struggles of contemporary politics. Through the fragmentary consciousness of her protagonist Mary Rose, as well as through the fragmentary

structure of the novel, MacDonald produces a discomfiting affect of disorientation, which is then transmitted to the reader. Mobilizing theories of insidious versus punctual trauma, I ask: How might the lure of newly achieved access to the ordinary lend itself to an erasure of the harms and violences of previous experiences of marginalization? How does one negotiate the discovery that not only trauma, but the intimacy that is trauma's antidote, is embedded in structures of normativity?

Lesbian feminists of the second wave located political transformation within diverse formations of intimacy among women. Likewise, contemporary theorizations have positioned 'queer' forms of intimacy as enabling alternative connections and modes of being. I understand such conceptualizations as presumptions that lesbian-feminist and queer subjects might both project ways of *doing* intimacy worthy of preservation. This lends to an understanding of why many contemporary queer and feminist theorists and activists do not view struggles for inclusion into heteronormative – and now 'homonormative' – forms of intimacy as an appropriate use of political energy. A move from the margins into the mainstream, accompanied by access to normative institutions such as marriage, is inevitably accompanied by a reconfiguration within intimate relationships. I argue that in politics, theory, and art, queer subjects are grappling with the question of what happens to identities, communities, and intimacies within this new framework. I ask how the normative privileging of the monogamous couple, for example, stands against the more diffuse intimacies among women foregrounded by lesbian feminists. I explore how friendships, chosen families, and political communities generate public and private spaces of intimacy. Finally, I examine how contemporary literature reinvests in, even as it reveals the complexities of, the intimacies that have always been so fundamental to queer life.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Several intersecting theoretical paradigms serve as points of departure for thinking about intimacy, sexuality, and politics across this dissertation: feminist and queer theory; figuration; affect; and queer temporalities. In my Introduction, I attended to my understanding and usage of feminist and queer theory, as well as to the ways in which I conceive of the 'figure of the lesbian' and 'lesbian existence' within literary texts. In this chapter I provide an historical and theoretical account of the so-called 'turn to affect' and of 'queer temporalities', paying particular attention to the ways in which these concepts are put to work in my analyses. In addition, I trace the development of trauma theory, focusing specifically on the influence of second wave feminism on theories of and responses to trauma.

In my discussion of 'intimacy', 'public', and 'private', I pointed out the dense theoretical lineages insinuated by these terms. As 'affect' and 'temporality' signal universally meaningful concepts such as feeling, emotion, sympathy, time, and space, they have also been theorized in diverse ways that both pre-exist and coexist with the body of work that I explore here. For example, postmodern conceptions of time as subjective and fluid both predate and overlap with queer temporality's challenge to linearity and progress, through the latter's focuses on institutions such as heterosexuality, family, and reproduction. While acknowledging the variety of significant contributions that have been made across those fields of inquiry that attend to notions of time and feeling, in this chapter I elaborate upon the specific development of theories of affect and queer temporalities as they have emerged out of feminist and queer scholarship.

2.2 The 'Turn' to Affect

Since the 1990s, the study of affect has become one of the most pervasive and productive strands of critical thought, generating a rich body of work across a range of disciplines.[10] 'The turn to affect', as it has been called, continues to inspire energetic debates about the definitions and uses of the term and about its relationship to knowledge, meaning, the political, and the social. The lack of ontological and epistemological consensus among scholars has made affect a slippery and at times frustrating concept. However, as Jennifer Cooke points out, the efflorescence of interest and diverse theorizations of affect across the sciences and humanities, point not only to a rich potential for research, but also to the ways in which "the language we have to talk about how we feel is inadequate. The term 'affect' often seems to slip into the gap where the complexity and mutability of our emotional terrains and states of being remain undisclosed or only partially captured by the names we've given them" (2015: 12). Shame has been a particularly ubiquitous example of this slippage, and has been explored in numerous publications for its complex causes, manifestations, and political uses.[11] Importantly for this dissertation, and central to the work that it draws upon, the myriad theorizations around affect indicate the need to expand our current explanations of the cultural and historical significance of feelings, emotions and affects, as well as the ways in which they persistently exceed the private sphere.

[10] For example, Cultural, Media, Film and Gender studies, Social Sciences, Cognitive Psychology and Neurology, Political Science, Ethnography, and Philosophy. Marie-Luise Angerer, Bernd Bösel, and Michaela Ott eds. (2014) point out that the usage of affect as well as the methodological approaches that are engaged vary across disciplines. For example, "many aesthetic theories refer to a concept of affect developed by Gilles Deleuze to address the questions of the constitution of sensory perception/aesthesis and the specificity of artistic forms of expression. In discourses focusing on media technology (neo-cybernetics, post-humanism) the concept of affect mixes philosophical notions with techno-empirical procedures" (7).

[11] See, for example: Sara Ahmed (2010): *The Promise of Happiness*; Sedgwick and Frank (eds.) (1995): *Shame and Its Sisters*; Elspeth Probyn (2005): *Blush: The Many Faces of Shame*; Sally R. Munt (2008): *Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame*; Lauren Berlant (2011): *Cruel Optimism*; Sianne Ngai (2005): *Ugly Feelings*; Sara Ahmed (2004): *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*; William Ian Miller (1997): *The Anatomy of Disgust*; Martha C. Nussbaum (2002): *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*.

The term 'affect' comes primarily from the disciplines of psychology and neuroscience. In their now canonical re-reading of the work of influential psychologist Silvan Tomkins, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank are widely seen as having inaugurated its usage in the humanities.[12] The 'turn to affect', or 'affective turn', has been positioned as a reaction to 'the linguistic turn' of structuralism, post-structuralism, and deconstruction.[13] In the introductory essay to *Shame and Her Sisters*, "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins", Sedgwick and Frank claim that one of the primary conventions of contemporary theory is that "language is assumed to offer the most productive, if not the only possible model for understanding representation" (1995: 1). Affect, then, is positioned as a shift away from this understanding of language as the central way of constructing the world, and towards embodied experiences and ways of knowing. While the linguistic turn could be characterized as attending to language and its organizing tropes, the affective turn concerns "a desire to address intimate aspects of life through attending to an enfleshed understanding of action and thought" (Papoulias and Callard 2010: 34).

In their introduction to *The Affect Reader*, Melissa Greig and Gregory J. Seigworth define affect as:

> Found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities

[12] Accounts of affect typically turn to three main theorists: Silvan Tomkins, particularly as recovered by Sedgwick and Frank, (eds.) in *Shame and Its Sisters*; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987): *A Thousand Plateaus*; and Brian Massumi (2002): *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*.

[13] In her article "Invoking Affect: Cultural Theory and the Ontological Turn" (2005), Clare Hemmings is critical of the progressive teleology of such new theoretical domains, both for how they position themselves as overcoming the problems produced by past theories and for how they necessarily simplify them. She writes: "[A]ffective rewriting flattens out poststructuralist inquiry by ignoring the counter-hegemonic contributions of postcolonial and feminist theorists, only thereby positioning affect as 'the answer' to contemporary problems of cultural theory" (548). Likewise, Ann Cvetkovich (2012) has critiqued the ways in which the turn to affect erases feminist scholarship, for example feminism's forging of connections between the personal and political.

> and resonances themselves. Affect […] is the name we give to those forces – visceral forces alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion […]. (2010: 1)

Affects have, then, been differently described as "intensities" and "forces" as well as being "other than" conscious knowing. Clare Hemmings provides a more concise definition, writing that "affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions" (2005: 551). We experience affect first, and recognize and attempt to interpret it later. This differentiation between affect and emotion has been emphasized to varying degrees by theorists of the affective turn. Some scholars, such as Sara Ahmed, Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Heather Love, use the term almost interchangeably; others, for example Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Tomkins, Sedgwick and Frank, and Eric Shouse, differentiate them rigorously. While affect could be generally summarized as a pre-cognitive, non-linguistic, visceral sensation – something that is relational and transformative – emotion is usually described as the "conscious labelling" of such sensation (Gregg and Seigworth 2010: 1). According to Jonathan Flatley, "[o]ne has emotions; one is affected by people or things" (2008: 12). While affect exists "beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious labelling of conscious thinking" (Greigg and Seigworth 2010: 1), emotion is the moment whereby we make sense of the aforementioned state of being. Shouse parses these distinctions even further, arguing that feelings can be understood differently from both emotion and affect. For Shouse, a feeling "is a sensation that has been checked against previous experiences and labelled. It is personal and biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations from which to draw when interpreting and labelling their feelings" (2005: online). An emotion, on the other hand, is the projection or display of that feeling – a display which unlike feelings, "can be either genuine or feigned" (ibid.). Shouse understands affect as the most abstract of these

terms, because it "cannot be fully realized in language," and because of its location "prior to and/or outside of consciousness" (ibid.). Cvetkovich, on the other hand, resists this neat distinction between affect, emotion, and feeling, which is anchored in the Deleuzian tradition of affect and reinforced by Shouse. For Cvetkovich, 'feeling' is a term that retains the tension and imprecision that exists between embodied sensations and linguistic or cognitive experiences or interpretations. An understanding of such terminological divergences is useful here, because a differentiation between affect as pre-discursive, and feeling and emotion as being tied to language and representation, lends itself well to the analysis of literary texts. I am particularly drawn to elaborations of affect as a pre-linguistic, embodied mode of knowledge, for example that of Gregg and Seigworth, because it enables a flexible understanding of what a 'body' might be. In this dissertation, I argue that such a 'body' might include a literary text.

The vocabulary of affect can be enigmatic and ambiguous, and affect itself, as Hemmings points out, is a state of being that we often experience first and recognize and attempt to interpret later. This conceptual instability makes affect and affect theory difficult to write about and this chapter promises no singular theory of affect. Instead, I will contextualize and make legible some of the concept's multiple lineages and definitions. More specifically, I will point to the particular uses of affect theory within the context of this dissertation: the unruly/unpredictable nature of affect; the transmission (or contagious nature) of affect; and the social or political function of affect. Through this elaboration, I hope to situate my own interrogation of affect within these wider debates. Moreover, I make a case for the utility of affect theory for thinking about the ways in which the figure of the lesbian complicates, transforms, and even queers the relationships between intimate, social, and political experience in contemporary feminist fiction.

The first framework through which I utilize affect in my analysis is one that

emphasizes its unpredictable and unruly nature. This can be understood through an elaboration of the relationship between theories of affect and theories of drives. Within a psychoanalytic framework, drives and instincts are understood to be the primary sources of human motivation. According to Federica Giardini, who locates her description of affect within the psychoanalytic accounts of Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Jean Bertrand Pontalis, and Jean Laplanche, affects are what enable drives to be satisfied. They are "the qualitative expression of our drives' energy and variations" (Giardini 1999: 150) and it is at the level of affect that drives are mediated and expressed. Unconvinced by the psychoanalytic subordination of affects to drives, Tomkins was the first to argue that affects are in fact the drives' "*primary* motivational system" (1962: 6, my emphasis). While drives and affects inevitably interact, they are nonetheless distinct from one another. Key to Tomkins' parsing of drives and affects is the notion that affects have more freedom in terms of their causes as well as the objects to which they can attach in order to gain satisfaction:

> The affect system […] differs from the drive signal system in two critical ways. First, there are numerous invariant instigators of any particular affect. The child may cry in distress if it is hungry or cold or wet or in pain or because of a high temperature […]. Secondly, there are numerous invariant reducers of the same affect. Crying can be stopped by feeding, cuddling, making the room warmer, making it colder, taking the diaper pin out of his skin and so on. (Tomkins 1962: 23)

In addition, affects have their own internal logic, "a singularity that creates its own circuitry" (Hemmings 2005: 552). Not only are affects more flexible in terms of their objects, they can also be self-referential and autonomous. Hemmings uses the example of love, which in addition to having many objects, may also be autotelic, that is, its own reward (ibid.). Affects may also take other affects as their object, as Sedgwick observes: "one can be excited by

anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy" (2003: 19). Likewise, one may be affected *by* affect, for example, "experiencing joy can be joyous and can make your feeling of joy be heightened" (ibid.).

Hemmings describes how this unpredictable autonomy of affect is illustrated in Deleuze's analysis of T.E Lawrence's account of his time in the desert. Deleuze gives the example of Lawrence's experience of gang rape, writing that "in the midst of his tortures, an erection, even in the state of sludge; there are convulsions that jolt the body" (1997: 123). This unruly quality of affect is vital to the arguments set forward in my dissertation, for it not only implies that affects may be produced by or attach to an unexpected or inappropriate object, but also that affects emerge and circulate at multiple layers which may be neither predictable nor coherent. Thus, foreshadowing later chapters in this dissertation and echoing Deleuze's invocation of Lawrence's rape in the desert, affects of pleasure or arousal may accompany experiences of personal violence such as sexual abuse, or public/historical violence such as wartime. In Chapter Three, for example, I analyse Dorothy Allison's 1992 novel *Bastard out of Carolina*, and focus on the narrative function of her protagonist's violent fantasies and masturbation as a form of working through her experience of sexual abuse. Likewise, in my analysis of Ann-Marie MacDonald's 2014 novel *Adult Onset*, in Chapter Six, I examine the disorientation and even disappointment that unexpectedly accompanies the contemporary acquisition of formal legal equality.

Likewise, melancholic *texts* might unexpectedly produce in their reader affects of consolation or even hope, in that they may be the means through which a reader locates themselves within a literary-historical community. Indeed, as I explore in more depth in Chapter Three, literature holds a special place in this regard in that the literary "often attracts queer readers whose private sense of gender and/or sexual difference compels them toward textual companions" (Medd 2015: 4). Such texts provoke queer reading practices that resist

automatic assumptions about legibility and affiliation. Thus, it is sometimes the case that, despite the frequently painful content of literary texts about gays and lesbians, for those who read and identify with them, the narratives may help to form and foster pleasurable affective-erotic historical and personal networks.[14]

The second quality of affect that informs my analysis is that of its contagious nature. Among the most significant contributions of affect theory is how it has challenged the way we think about emotions, shifting them from the realm of the purely private to the social and public. Tomkins saw affect as relational, claiming, in Hemmings' words, that "affect connects us to others and provides the individual with a way of narrating their own inner life (likes, dislikes, desires and revulsions) to themselves and others" (Hemmings 2005: 552). In this way he theorized affect as key to positionality and subject formation. Tomkins proposed the term "affect theories" to describe all of the accumulated traces of affective experiences that we store in our bodies and which are recalled at the moment of responding to a new situation.

The "contagious" quality of affect has been taken up by various contemporary theorists.[15] Anna Gibbs, for example, describes bodies as "catching feelings as easily as they catch fire" (2001: 1). Similarly, Teresa Brennan (2004) writes about how an "affective atmosphere" can penetrate the individual and produce not only psychological but physiological effects. Referring to the title of her book, *The Transmission of Affect,* Brennan writes:

> […] I am using the term 'transmission of affect' to capture a process that is social in

[14] Such identification and pleasure is not unmitigated by ambivalence. Heather Love, for example, describes how negative representations of queer life have frequently been rejected by critics who argue that "the depiction of same-sex love as impossible, tragic, and doomed to failure is purely ideological" (2007: 1). Love's project thinks about the ways in which "early work in gay and lesbian studies tended to deny the significance of these depressing accounts" (ibid.).

[15] See for example, Anna Gibbs (2001); Teresa Brennan (2004); Sedgwick (2003); Elspeth Probyn (2005); Ahmed (2004, 2010).

> origin but biological and physical in effect. The origin of transmitted affects is social in that these affects do not only arise within a particular person but also come from without. They come via an interaction with other people and an environment. But they have a physiological impact. By the transmission of affect, I mean simply that the emotions or affects of one person, and the enhancing or depressing energies these affects entail, can enter into another. (3)

This understanding of affect as both cumulative and contagious is critical to the analysis set forward in this dissertation, as I will propose that in the primary literary texts affect accrues around certain events and figures. Locating affect not only in the text itself, but also in the intimate space created between text and reader, I examine the way that literary devices are engaged within the novels in order to produce such spaces, which I will call "affective temporalities."

Sara Ahmed calls Brennan's account of the "transmission of affect" an "outside in" model that emerges from the intellectual histories of crowd psychology and sociology of emotion. While Ahmed rejects this "outside in" model, she is equally critical of the more widely accepted "inside out" model, which conceives of emotion as something that begins within the individual and travels out towards the world. Here, is the third dimension of affect that I find useful for my analysis: Ahmed's theorization specifically asks us to think about affect's social and political functions. Drawing on psychoanalytic and Marxist thought, Ahmed conceives of affect as an economy, asking: "How do emotions work to align some subjects with some others and against other others?" (2004: 117). For Ahmed (who uses the terms emotion and affect interchangeably), emotions *involve* subjects and objects and yet they do not reside positively within them. Rather they circulate in unexpected ways, working to align subjects with or against one another. Ahmed theorizes affects as "sticking" to certain bodies, and being capable of "sliding" between them. For Ahmed, this mode of theorization

means attending to the ways in which hatred, for example, gets distributed as a national affect which is directed at the nation's racialized others, aligning dissimilar figures such as "the mixed-racial couple, the child molester, the rapist, aliens, and foreigners […] [who] come to embody the threat of loss: lost jobs, lost money, lost land", a slide between figures, who come to be alike in their "unlikeness" from "us" (119). Likewise, Ahmed has theorized the ways in which the attribution of "wilfulness" is used to describe those who will "wrongly or will too much". I take explore this notion of wilfulness in Chapter Five via MacDonald's characterization of Madeleine McCarthy, the protagonist of her 2003 novel *The Way the Crow Flies*.

Affects are thus located neither "within" nor "without". They are not merely contagious, but "create the very effect of the surfaces or boundaries of bodies and worlds" (Ahmed 2004: 118). This shows us that affects are not a private matter, simply belonging to individuals, but rather have overtly social and political implications.[16] Ahmed writes: "Rather than seeing emotions as psychological dispositions, we need to consider how they work, in concrete and particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (119). For Berlant, like Ahmed, the transmission or contagion of affect is necessarily social. Reflecting upon how affective atmospheres are shared, not solitary, Berlant describes what she calls "an intimate public sphere," which she defines as "a space of mediation in which the personal is refracted

[16] While some scholars, such as Ahmed and Berlant, see affects as being in a constant process of shaping and being shaped by social and political structures, others, like Simon O'Sullivan, argue that because affects are "moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter", they are not to do with knowledge or meaning but occur instead on a different, "asignifying register" (2001: 126). Following Sedgwick and Frank, O'Sullivan characterizes contemporary theory, specifically Marxism and Deconstruction, as cynical aesthetic blindness. He writes: "First, aesthetics fell foul of Marxism. A disinterested beauty? A transcendent aesthetic? Ideological! Then it fell foul of deconstruction. The apparatus of capture that is deconstruction. Derrida neatly reconfiguring the discourse of aesthetics as a discourse of/on representation. Aesthetics is deconstructed, and art becomes a broken promise. Both Marxism and deconstruction were, still are, powerful critiques. However, deconstruction especially, is negative critique par excellence" (2001: 126). For O'Sullivan, art is a 'bundle of affects', which cannot be read or interpreted, but only experienced.

through the general" (2008: viii). Berlant gives the example of the intimate public sphere of "women's culture" in which cultural products such as soap operas, chat shows, romantic comedies, and chick lit, alongside a range of consumer products, are positioned as an essential part of women's lives; for those marked by femininity, they are "a way of experiencing one's own story as part of something social" (2008: x). In the following chapters I theorize trauma itself as a kind of intimate public sphere. I argue that through feminist interventions into theories of and responses to trauma, intimate experiences of violence have been brought into the public sphere and politicized as part of larger structures of oppression. Through therapeutic culture, disclosure, and speaking out, which I discuss in more detail in Chapter Three, public spaces have been cultivated within which women might speak out about their experiences of violence in a way that has been historically impossible. Such spaces of identification and healing extend to and are often facilitated by the literary, specifically lesbian feminist and queer literature.

One might also understand Love's seminal book on queer negativity, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History,* as attending to such an "intimate public sphere". Considering a selection of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century queer literary texts, Love suggests that "rather than disavowing the history of [queer] marginalization and abjection […] we embrace it, exploring the ways it continues to structure queer experience in the present" (2007: 29). *Feeling Backward* resists the contemporary impulse to forget the injury of the past, which she sees as a form of erasure of the suffering that has been and continues to be a formative component of queer existence. Love's task is not to deny the existence of such an impulse but to contest it. Describing the critical aversion to the sadness of literary accounts of queer life, Love writes:

> Despite complaints about their toxicity, such tragic, tear-soaked accounts of same-sex desire compel readers in a way that brighter stories of liberation do not. Although

> it may be difficult to account for the continuing hold of these texts on us in the present, we have evidence of it in the powerful feelings – both positive and negative – that they inspire. (3)

Love suggests that, despite the critical compulsion to repair or deny the historical stigma of homosexuality, the affective temporalities of queer history can help us to be alive to the structures of inequality that continue to exist. More importantly, perhaps, for Love: "Resisting the call of gay normalization means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead" (30). Following Love's turn to backward feelings, my reading turns to the backward figure of the lesbian. Such a figure, as I described in my Introduction, often represents, in a post-identitarian present, a moment of error in feminist history that has been surpassed by queer theory and politics.[17] I use this disposition to the past in order to gesture towards moments in which literary representations of violence and stigma generate something affectively unexpected and even transformative. This is particularly evident in my reading, in Chapter Three, of *Bastard out of Carolina* alongside lesbian feminist utopian projects of writing and living.

Following theorists such as Ahmed, Berlant, and Love, in this dissertation I understand affect as continuously constituting and re-constituting the personal, social, and political. My analysis relies heavily upon the understanding of affects as circulating among bodies and signs. I attend in particular to those moments when this circulation works in unexpected ways, unfolding and aligning seemingly incongruous subjects, experiences and affects with one another and transforming the very surfaces and boundaries of how they are

[17] Elizabeth Freeman articulates this in her concept of temporal drag, writing: "the lesbian stands as a representational figure of past feminist errors and 'wrong-directions' within a broadly conceived contemporary queer present" (2000: 232). This critique of the tendency to represent feminism's history as linear or generational has been taken up by various theorists such as Hemmings, Robyn Wiegman, and Annamarie Jagose. In her essay "Feminism and its Ghosts" (2005), with which I engaged more fully in my Introduction, Victoria Hesford contends that feminism is haunted by its past, and particularly by what she terms the "feminist-as-lesbian", a figure who binds us both to the disavowed historical moment in which she was produced, as well as to her unrealized potential.

understood. This circulation of affect, particularly unexpected affect, emerges in various places across my analysis. Some of these include the positioning of happiness as a burden rather than a pleasure, and the subsequent affect of shame in *The Way the Crow Flies* and *Adult Onset*, or the space of respite and desire produced within the traumatic context of wartime in *Fall on Your Knees*. Thinking about affects in the three ways I have outlined above: as unpredictable and unruly; contagious; and connected to the political and social, facilitates a nuanced reading of the way that affect and intimacy, and politics work together in my primary texts.

2.3 Queer Temporalities

Alongside affect, my thesis is also marked by an attention to those times and spaces of intimacy that are created within texts as well as within and across historical periods. I explored such intimacies—and their centrality to the projects and theories of lesbian feminism—in my Introduction. The purpose of this section is to situate my dissertation's intervention by providing an overview of a body of work that has come to be known as 'queer temporalities'. I demonstrate the ways in which the relationships among gender, time, and space are not only the recent concern of queer theory, but have also been long standing interests of feminist theorizing.

Additionally, I will elaborate upon the crossovers and entanglements between theories of temporality and affect, which together provide the basis of my analysis through what is described in my title as *affective temporalities*. Although, as Elizabeth Freeman points out, time has always been a dominant concern in queer theory, the inauguration of a specific 'turn' towards temporality in queer theory is now predominantly marked by a 2007 special issue of the journal *GLQ* entitled "Queer Temporalities". Included in this issue are a

number of articles by leading thinkers in the field, as well as a roundtable discussion that outlines the contributors' various approaches to the question of time in queer theory.[18]

I understand the theoretical paradigm of 'queer temporalities' as working in two ways. The first interrogates the progressive logic of heteronormative and reproductive temporalities. Here, queerness becomes a way of being in the world that refuses the narratives of progress, development, and maturity, and disrupts the linear organization of time. Within this framework, 'straight time' describes the heteronormative temporalities that legitimize the particular social processes and institutions that "organize how we live and imagine everyday life" Bryson and Stacey 2012: 7). Queer thinkers have turned to those whose lives have placed them on the edge a of sociality organized through heteronormative temporalities" (ibid.: 8), harnessing the pull of queer (sub)cultures, queer subjects and queer artistic and literary practices in order to open up new ways of exploring the possibilities and pleasures of living outside of normative modes of time. Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) provides a lens through which to understand temporality as it relates to queerness. For Halberstam, queer time provides a narrative outside of the conventional heteronormative organization of everyday lives and lifetimes, offering an extension of the pleasure normally restricted to adolescence and the refusal of teleological imperatives towards maturation through reproductive adulthood. In *In a Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam uses the example of queer subcultures to illustrate the ways in which it is possible to live outside of such conventions. Later describing their own investment in queer temporalities in the *GLQ* roundtable, Halberstam writes:

> I hear a voice in my head saying fuck family, fuck marriage, fuck the male teachers, this is not my life, that will not be my time line. Queer time for me is the dark

[18] The *Theorizing Queer Temporalities* roundtable was conducted via email in March, April and May of 2006 and included Carolyn Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang.

> nightclub, the perverse turn away from the narrative coherence of adolescence – early adulthood – marriage – reproduction – child rearing – retirement – death, the embrace of late childhood in place of early adulthood or immaturity in place of responsibility. It is a theory of queerness as a way of being in the world and a critique of the careful social scripts that usher even the most queer among us through major markers of individual development and into normativity. (2007: 182)

Queerness for Halberstam, then, finds its utility not in the refusal or reification of futurity, but rather in the way that it makes space for queer lives outside of the pull of heteronormativity.

Another way of thinking about queer temporalities is via the notion of embodied intersubjectivities, which describes how bodies are only made intelligible through encounters with other bodies. The suggestion that time is constituted by affective encounters between and among embodied subjects connects temporality to affect. Such a reading of queer temporality emerges from those theoretical trajectories that encourage us to think about sexuality in terms of the intensities that pass between bodies. Accounts of this way of thinking about time are often traced back to Elizabeth Grosz's 1995 work *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* and are classified under the rubric of 'the new materialism of feminist theory', as elaborated by scholars such as Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Wilson, and Vicki Kirby. Theories of affect, temporality, and queerness are connected through their foregrounding of embodied intersubjectivities and historicity. These two foci make clear how we can read affect as the very thing that queers temporality, insofar as it binds bodies to bodies in time and space. As I have discussed above, the interplay of affect and temporality allows me to consider the intimacies created when a textual body connects with that of a reader, or a text attaches to a community, also understood as a body.

Contemporary critical accounts of queer temporalities often foreground Lee

Edelman's *No Futures: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004). Edelman's Lacanian polemic critiques what he calls the "coercive universalization" of the "image of the Child" (11). For Edelman, the unquestioned and unquestionable value of "a child whose innocence solicits our defence" takes the shape of a necessarily political heteronormativity, which he calls "reproductive futurism" (2). Articulating the social impossibility of refusing to be on "the side of" (3) the Child, Edelman's provocation is in his claim that "queerness names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside of the consensus, by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism" (ibid.). Edelman refuses to reject the ascription of the antisocial to the queer, and instead draws upon Lacan, claiming that queerness figures both the death drive,[19] and "the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (9). For Edelman, queerness "attains its ethical value precisely insofar as it accedes to that place, accepting its figural status as resistance to the viability of the social while insisting on the inextricability of such resistance from every social structure" (3). Thus, the political utility of queerness lies precisely in its negative signification. Edelman's move is certainly not a utopian one, but rather one which refuses any kind of hope, which he claims would "only reproduce the constraining mandate of futurism […]" (4). Edelman refuses the impulse to repair the ascription of negativity to the queer and counters the contemporary focus on the acquisition of formal legal equality and inclusion.

Edelman's intervention is generative for my project, particularly for the challenge I make to straightforward narratives of the contemporary as a moment of the achievement of progress or singular historicisations of wartime. The work that I attempt to do in this dissertation does not outright reject the possibility of transformation, however, but looks to the literary archive in order to locate unexpected textual moments of resistance that enable other possibilities for living. I will explore this more in Chapter Four, through my analysis

[19] For more on the death drive and its place in queer theory, see Teresa de Lauretis, *Freud's Drive* (2010).

of queer intimacy during wartime in Ann-Marie MacDonald's 1996 novel, *Fall on Your Knees*.

Utopian visions are at the core of Jose Esteban Muñoz's seminal text *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futures* (2009). Invoking the work of German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch to counter the negative force of Edelman's *No Futures,* Muñoz movingly argues instead for a "forward-dawning futurity" (1). He writes: "Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (ibid.). For Muñoz, then, queerness necessarily implies both a critical and affective investment in utopia, which he locates in the aesthetic practices of visual culture and art. Such an investment does not necessarily imply that such a future could come to pass, but rather has a reparative function.[20] Positioning affect as a reparative response to the "paranoid" practices of the linguistic turn, Muñoz compares the dismissal of utopian political thinking with the "smearing of psychoanalytic or deconstructive reading practices with the charge of nihilism" (2009: 10) and aligns his utopian readings with Sedgwick's notion of reparative hermeneutics.

I find Muñoz' reluctance to foreground gay male sexuality in his exploration of utopias both useful to my analysis and politically meaningful. In contrast to Edelman's approach, Muñoz's arguments are situated in conversation with the work of queer feminist and queer of colour critiques. Turning to a scene from Eileen Myles' 1994 memoir *Chelsea Girls* in order to illustrate the concept of radical negativity, Muñoz explains his selection of this text, writing:

[20] Sedgwick's notion of 'paranoid reading' critiques what might be understood as a hermeneutic of suspicion, a style of reading whereby one anticipates their critique in advance. Sedgwick claimed that in assuming such a positionality, the reader often reproduces the very structures that they intended to critique. 'Reparative reading' on the other hand, enables and encourages affect-based forms of knowledge, reaffirming the pleasures to be found in texts.

> The prime examples of queer antirelationality in Bersani's *Homos* and Lee Edelman's *No Future,* and all the other proponents of this turn in queer criticism are scenes of jouissance, which are always described as shattering orgasmic ruptures often associated with gay male sexual abandon or self-styled risky behaviour. Maybe the best example of an anti-relational scene that I could invoke would be another spectacular instance of sexual transgression […]. But instead I choose to focus on this relational line between a young white lesbian and an older white man […]. (2009: 14)

Muñoz locates queerness in the future, but also locates it in the practice of art as well as in those unforeseen intimacies generated among disparate bodies and identities, such as the one that he describes here. Similarly, in this dissertation I look to those textual moments that disrupt or complicate identities and temporalities through intimate connections. Such interventions open up intimate spaces within which the connections among the past, present and future, might become less tidy. Moreover, I read Muñoz' conception of queer utopias as performing the theory that it elaborates, in the way that it evokes the lesbian feminism conceived of decades earlier and disavowed by the very discipline within which he is located.

As I have described above, some theorists, for example Jack Halberstam, turn to sites of queer subcultures such as the nightclub in order to undo the progressive logic of heteronormative temporalities. Others, such as Freeman or Love, look to the past, examining literary texts to think about "backwards emotions" (Freeman 2010: 11). Indeed, as Freeman describes, "[t]his stubborn lingering of pastness [is] a hallmark of queer affect [...]" (ibid.). Each of the three novels that I examine in this dissertation look to the past in order to explore sexuality's constitution in the present. I argue that combining affect and temporality facilitates an exploration of the spaces opened up by queer intimacy in MacDonald's texts.

Describing what she calls a shift from "effective history" to "affective history", Love writes: "Recently, long-standing debates about gay and lesbian history have shifted from discussions of the stability of sexual categories over time to explorations of the relation between queer historians and the subjects they study" (2007: 31). Love describes the impulse to locate and connect with those queer figures found in the literary and historical archive as coinciding with the "identifications, the desires, the longings, and the love that structure the encounter with the queer past" (ibid.). Love and others have pointed out that such affective investments are often disavowed in favour of a focus on the heroic work of historic recovery, ignoring the complex impulses that motivate such scholarly pursuits

This work of historic recovery is complicated by thinkers like Carolyn Dinshaw, who focuses on the queer impulse to touch the past in her book *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999). Dinshaw investigates the affective dynamics of queer history from her perspective as a Medievalist, claiming that the desire for community exists in a state of tension with the queer tendency towards isolation. She proposes the paradoxical notion of "shared isolation", acknowledging that such connections are partial and incomplete. Dinshaw specifically differentiates this fellowship of the "isolated, the abject, [and] the shamed" (22) from a more idealized version of community. In a forum about *Getting Medieval*, she writes: "I want to stress that the community across time formed of such vibrations, such touches is not necessarily a feel-good collectivity of happy homos" (2001: 38). Valerie Traub compares her own project in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (2002) to Dinshaw's, proposing that, rather than identification, we should turn towards desire. Traub's main concern, though, is with the melancholic nature of lesbian studies. She argues that "[t]he effort to identify early modern lesbians is not so much a case of individual misrecognition as a collective melancholic response to the trauma of historical elision" (350). Carla Freccero describes this affective force as being a kind of

"haunting". She attempts "to forge a kind of ethics of haunting that would motivate queer historiographic endeavours through the project of queering temporality" (2007: 489). For Freccero, such a "haunting would be reciprocal in that it would entail a willingness both to be haunted and to become ghostly, and insofar as the reciprocal penetrability entailed would also be sensuous – a commingling of times as affective and erotic experience – it would also be queer" (ibid.). What theorists such as Love, Dinshaw, Traub and Freccero, among others, bring to our attention, are the affective ties that attach scholars to their objects of study. Such ties transcend temporal and spatial boundaries, and the desires that compel queer scholars to seek identification in the past produce their own affects, which emerge in their scholarship. As I discussed in my introduction, in this dissertation I am attentive to such a mode of reflexivity, which has always been a key method of feminist research.

2.4 Feminism and Time

Feminism and queer theory have, Victoria Hesford argues, often been framed as having "left each untouched and unnoticed by one another" (2013: 6). In incorporating feminist analyses of time into the archive of queer temporalities I challenge the positioning of queer theory as a move 'on' from feminism. The gendering of time has long been a site of feminist concern, and feminism's engagements with time have emerged on multiple levels. Historically, for example, feminists have theorized the concept of domestic or cyclical time as being in opposition to historical or linear time; more recently, they have critiqued the production of generational models of feminist history that have been dominant in the telling of the development of Western feminist theorizing over time.

When thinking about the history of feminist theorizations of time, one might turn to Julia Kristeva. In "Women's Time" (1981 [1979]), Kristeva articulated the significance of

temporality to feminist work, claiming that the cyclical, repetitive time of the domestic and reproductive spheres exists in opposition to those linear and progress-oriented temporalities of culture and history. This discrete teleology of history is positioned as being inherently in opposition to, as well as in an antagonistic relationship with, female subjectivity. For Kristeva, central to feminist politics is the conflict between the attempt to "gain a place in a linear time as the time of project and history" or to "situate itself outside other linear time of identities" (19). This question of the political utility of inclusion remains a contentious topic in both feminist and queer politics and theory and emerges in my own analysis, where, in my examination of the novel *Adult Onset*, I consider the disorientation and ambivalence produced by the increasing mainstream acceptance of gay and lesbian subjects.

In their work, theorists such as Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, Anne McClintock, and Chandra Mohanty have also framed the gendering of time through the question of national time. McClintock, for example, claims, that in colonial discourse, women are represented as the "atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural) embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity" and men come to be the 'progressive agent of national modernity' (forward thrusting, potent and historic) embodying nationalism's progressive or revolutionary principle of discontinuity" (1995: 359). According to McClintock, this colonial discourse positions women on the side of tradition and men on the side of progress. Numerous other recent analyses critique notions of progress and women's rights, arguing that gender has become a salient indicator of a nation's progress and that discourses of gender equality are mobilized ubiquitously in contemporary international politics and media.[21]

In *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (2011), Hemmings troubles the tendency of Western feminist theory to produce and reproduce its

[21] See, for example, Lisa Duggan (2002); Jasbir Puar (2007); Madhavi Menon (2015).

history via narratives centred around notions of progress, loss, and return. Hemmings argues that such narratives obscure the complexities as well as the transformative potential of feminist theorizing. This is particularly significant to the analysis set forward in this dissertation, as Hemmings points out the ways in which lesbian feminism is often written out of such accounts or positioned as belonging to a backwards moment of feminist history. Hemmings' intervention recalls Freeman's concept of "temporal drag" (2010) and Hesford's figuring of the "feminist-as-lesbian" (2005), both of which I discussed in my Introduction. Tracing these lineages demonstrates that feminist interventions into concepts of time both pre-exist and continue to inform the contemporary theorizations of 'queer temporalities.'[22] Jagose, for example, warns against reifying the "queer" of queer temporality or being proprietorial about concepts that have always been at the heart of examinations of time and history. She writes:

> Rather than invoke as our straight guy a version of time that is always linear, teleological, reproductive, future oriented, what difference might it make to acknowledge the intellectual traditions in which time has also been influentially thought and experienced as cyclical, interrupted, multi-layered, reversible, stalled- and not always in contexts easily recuperated as queer? (2007: 186-187)

While its contributions to our understandings of time are innovative, positioning queer theory as the first to explore the limitations of conventional notions of time risks excluding the contributions generated by approaches such as deconstruction, feminist theory, postmodernism and postcolonial theory.

[22] Carla Freccero points out that "[a]longside postcolonial critiques of modernity, there has also been a 'queering' of temporality through its relation to desire, fantasy, wish, and the impossibility of sustaining linear narratives of teleological time" (2007: 489). She references Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994), which continued those "mediation[s] on time begun long before his own work and in the wake of a certain 'prophetic' Marxism (perhaps most importantly Walter Benjamin's writings on secular messianism)" (ibid.).

This dissertation is concerned with textual moments in which "an established temporal order gets interrupted and new encounters consequently take place" (Freeman 2010: xxii) as well as with the disavowal of the lesbian and of lesbian feminism from the progress-oriented trajectories of feminism and queer theory. Theories of queer temporalities, then, are useful in two senses. First, tracing some of the foundational thinking of queer theory back to the political and literary archive of feminism challenges the generational logic that erases the contributions of historical paradigms. Second, in its foregrounding of affect, embodiment, and intimacy, queer conceptions of time are generative in my exploration of the affective temporalities produced through the figuration of lesbianism in literary texts.

2.5 The Queer Temporalities of Trauma

Across the novels analysed in this dissertation, one might speak of something called the queer temporality of traumatic memory. As Cathy Caruth points out, trauma's tendency to emerge belatedly or to only be understood as traumatic after the fact, means that it "is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident in connection with another place, and in another time" (1995: 8). In this dissertation, I argue that within literary narratives, the figure of the lesbian is frequently located in close proximity to trauma. In such texts, trauma emerges at the level of plot and through narrative devices. However, in addition to this, the authors also exhibit a self-consciousness in their narratives, demonstrating that, as Alan Gibbs (2014) has suggested, the critical paradigm of trauma has in its "creeping ubiquity […] influence[d] the form of cultural products, such that an identifiable 'trauma genre' has emerged" (2). Gibbs describes this as a "self-reinforcing circuit of fictional and non-fictional prose narratives that exist[s] in tandem with a supporting critical structure" (ibid.).

Although I find Gibbs' characterization of the trauma paradigm and the literature of

trauma at times reductive and dismissive, he nevertheless does do vital work in drawing attention to the often mutually constitutive nature of theoretical and imaginative thinking and writing. Furthermore, Gibbs' claim is particularly useful in thinking through the ways in which contemporary trauma theory has influenced not only forms of cultural production, but what we might call accepted knowledge: how we think about the lived experience of trauma and recovery. This emerges in my analysis of *Adult Onset*, whose protagonist's familiarity with trauma discourses at times seems to produce the symptoms that she understands as associated with it. A full genealogy of trauma in all its theoretical, clinical, and historical variations is beyond the scope of this study and has already been thoroughly chronicled in numerous works.[23] In the following section, I briefly chart the emergence of trauma theory as such, with a focus upon those theories of trauma that have been particularly influential in the field of literary studies and those that have been influenced by feminist thought in their understanding of trauma within a framework of structural inequalities such as gender, race, and class. In particular, I consider the mutually constitutive nature of feminist thought and practice and theories of trauma and therapeutic culture.

2.6 Historicizing Interdisciplinary Theories of Trauma

Accounts of contemporary trauma theory often begin with a reference to Judith Herman's 1992 study *Trauma and Recovery.* Despite the book's scholarly and clinical basis – specifically twenty years of research alongside therapeutic work with victims of sexual and domestic violence – Herman historicizes trauma in a way that is accessible, attempting to provide a general readership with an outline of the symptoms and steps toward recovery.

[23] See, for example, Ruth Leys (2000): *Trauma: A Genealogy*; and Roger Lockhurst (2008): *The Trauma Question*.

For Herman, these steps include "establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma story, and restoring the connection between survivors and their community" (3). Additionally, and perhaps most significantly, Herman was the first scholar to move trauma studies beyond its initial focus on military conflict and combatants to take into consideration everyday events such as childhood abuse, "integrating the feminine world of sexual trauma with the masculine one of war trauma" (Cvetkovich 2003: 31). Drawing attention to the mobilizing forces of social justice activism, such as the anti-war and women's movements, Herman's work utilized a feminist standpoint to inaugurate and develop more complex theorizations of trauma.

Herman provides an account of discussions of trauma over the past century, highlighting key moments in its theoretical and clinical evolution. She begins in the nineteenth century with Freud's work on hysteria, specifically with his controversial 1896 proclamation that "at the bottom of every case of hysteria there are one or more occurrences of premature sexual experience, occurrences which belong to the earliest years of childhood" (qtd. in Herman: 13).[24] By 1897, however, Freud had retracted his assertion that all women had been sexually abused by their fathers, instead setting forward a theory about the universal sexual *fantasies* of sons and daughters. In his more well-known Oedipal model of psychic ontogeny, he claims he was "obliged to recognize that these scenes of seduction had never taken place, and that they were only fantasies which my patients had made up" (qtd. in Herman: 13). There is a shift here in Freud's understanding of (or willingness to understand) the origins of what was then called hysteria in childhood sexual exploitation. Freud's initial statement might be viewed as a surprisingly early gesture towards the idea that one can locate women's psychological trauma within the larger framework of their

[24] Delivered on October 15, 1896 at a meeting of the *Society for Psychiatry and Neurology* in Vienna, Freud's paper, entitled "The Aetiology of Hysteria", was a report on eighteen of his case studies and was badly received by his colleagues.

structural inequality. This notion, now fundamental to trauma studies, would not become accepted knowledge until decades after Freud's assertion.

Moving into the twentieth century, the next phase of trauma discourses emerged out of World War I. The notion of "shell shock" attributed the troubled and unstable behaviour of war veterans to the physical suffering sustained during war. Herman writes that "[f]or most of the twentieth century it was the study of combat veterans that led to the development of a body of knowledge about traumatic disorders" (28). However, it eventually became clear that above the *physical* trauma, it was in fact the sustained *psychological* trauma of trench warfare that was severely impacting the mental health of returning soldiers. The paradigm for understanding trauma shifted again in the 1960s and 1970s, and the contemporary field of trauma studies emerged out of two key areas: Holocaust studies on the one hand and social justice movements, such as second wave feminism and anti-war activism, on the other. Additionally, in 1980, the addition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) III* made psychological trauma an official diagnosis, recognizing symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, disturbed sleep, and a distracted mind.[25] This made explicit the connections among the symptoms of trauma exhibited by survivors of myriad forms of violence.[26] In the rest of this section I will focus on the influence of second-wave feminists and wider social justice activism on trauma studies.[27]

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[25] Within the *DSM-III*, the diagnostic criteria for PTSD was fourfold and included: Traumatic Event; Re-experiences of the event; Numbing phenomena; and Miscellaneous symptoms. According to Leys: "The traumatic event was vaguely defined as an event that is 'generally outside the range of usual human experience,' and as involving a 'recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone'" (2000: 232).

[26] Brown (2008) points out that the addition to *DSM-III* was the result of cooperation between feminists psychotherapists, many of who were working both within the Women's Liberation Movement as well as directly with victims of abuse, antiwar Veterans Administration staff, some of them veterans of Vietnam themselves. Due to the socially conscious nature of both groups, Brown writes that it is surprising that the effects of other forms of social injustices such as racism, classism, heterosexism were not considered in their analysis.

[27] Although Freud is often the starting point when historicizing trauma, scholars such as Ruth Leys (2000) have traced trauma theory's roots farther back.

Herman writes: "Not until the women's liberation movement […] was it recognized that the most common post-traumatic disorders are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life" (28). As women began to speak out about their experiences of sexualized violence, researchers followed, collecting empirical data about the prevalence of rape and sexual abuse in women's lives. Feminists also began to theorize the connections between sexualized violence and the upholding of patriarchy.[28] In the early 1980s, sociologist and human rights activist Diana Russell described incest as the "secret trauma" and conducted an influential study in which she found that one of four women had been raped and one of three had been sexually abused in childhood. Feminist scholars such as Russell began to criticize figures such as Freud and sexologists such as Alfred Kinsey, claiming that despite their unprecedented openness "about the prevalence of homosexuality, masturbation, premarital and extramarital sexual relations, sexual contacts with animals, and some women's capacity for multiple orgasms" they were "unwilling to address the problem of child sexual abuse" (1986: 7-8). These theorizations of sexual violence as a mechanism of patriarchal power were accompanied by development in therapeutic praxis, including 'feminist therapy'.[29] Feminist therapy first emerged from the consciousness-raising groups of the Second Wave Women's Movement. It integrated a recognition of the impact of structural violence such as sexism and racism, and an emphasis upon the importance of breaking the silence around issues such as domestic abuse and incest, into a more traditional model of therapy. Psychotherapist and theorist Laura Brown describes CR as holding "the same place in feminist therapy that the concept of the unconscious has in psychodynamic

[28] The connection between sexual violence and structural gender equality are elaborated in the work of Susan Griffin (1971): "Rape: The All-American Crime"; Susan Brownmiller (1975): *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*; and Ann Cahill (2001): "A Phenomenology of Fear: The Threat of Rape and Feminine Bodily Comportment". This work positions rape as a means of maintaining patriarchal power through limiting women's mobility, threatening their safety, and keeping them in a state of fear.

[29] Russell (1986) "cites 1978 as the year when the first feminist analyses of incest were published in book form. She claims that the publication of Sandra Butler's *Conspiracy of Silence* and Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* was a turning point in the discussion of incest, which then took a more victim-oriented perspective" (Grogan 2011: 7).

formulations, as the core construct from which all practice has grown and around which practice continues to center" (1994: 22). For Brown, the value of feminist psychology lies in its "attention to issues of power and social location and to how people's experiences of gender, culture, social class, sexuality, and other experiences that denote inter- and intrapersonal power or powerlessness might affect both distress and resilience in response to traumatic stress" (2008: 2). Brown points out that the central symptoms of trauma involve issues of control and powerlessness and thus that feminist practice, with its power-based analyses, is uniquely well-suited to the study and treatment of trauma.

Although Herman's work has been criticized – for instance for its failure to consider the influence of other intersecting factors such as race/ethnicity, immigration, and poverty – her insistence that "the psychological syndrome seen in survivors of rape, domestic battery and incest was essentially the same as the syndrome seen in survivors of war" (32) provoked an invaluable paradigm shift in linking public and private trauma. The twin emergence of second-wave feminist politics and the field of trauma studies, as exemplified by Herman's study, has had a lasting impact upon not only interdisciplinary understandings of trauma, but upon the political and theoretical principles of feminism. I read the fictional works examined later in this dissertation as powerfully influenced by this entanglement.

2.7 Insidious and Punctual Trauma

Alongside Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*, in 1992 feminist therapist Maria Root published "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality" in which she introduced the concepts of "vicarious trauma" and "insidious trauma". Brown describes insidious trauma as the

> traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to the bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the

> soul and spirit. Root's model suggests, for instance, that for all women living in a culture where there is a high base rate of sexual assault and where such behaviour is considered normal and erotic by men [...] is an exposure to insidious trauma. (107)

Insidious trauma was, and remains, a useful concept, because it aids in understanding the psychological impact of diverse categories of structural inequality, such as institutionalized sexism, racism, and classism. Foregrounding these issues, and critiquing the limited perspectives of traditional trauma theories, Root argues that we must "[r]econsider the embeddedness of current notions of trauma in conceptual frameworks that may exclude many of the current traumas of women of color and insidious trauma sustained by many people of color and women" (382). In 1995, Brown published "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma" in the collection of essays edited by Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, in which she further developed Root's notion of insidious trauma. Brown criticized the event-based model of trauma as it was set forward in *DSM-III*, claiming that, in fact, women experience abusive situations daily. In their chronic, seemingly innocuous nature, these situations diverge from 'punctual' forms of trauma, such as rape, and yet nevertheless produce the same effects. Herman agreed with Brown and Root, writing that: "There is a spectrum of traumatic disorders, ranging from the effects of a single overwhelming event, to the more complicated effects of prolonged and repeated abuse" (1992: 3). The research of feminist theorists and practitioners was effective in challenging the punctual model of understanding trauma, resulting in changes in the *DSM-IV* that accounted for the impact of insidious trauma. The thinking of Root and Brown was significantly influenced by the theorizing of women of colour such as bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Toni Morrison who offered sustained critical analyses of the interconnectedness of sexism, classism and racism, and the ways in which they work together as mechanisms of patriarchal power. In *Cultural Competence in Trauma*: *Beyond*

the Flashback (2008), Brown advances the model of insidious trauma further, in order to develop a culturally competent theory of trauma that takes into account issues such as intersecting historical and geopolitical contexts, social locations, and the biopsychosocial and spiritual dimensions of identities. This simultaneous distinction between and overlapping of diagnostic understandings of trauma, the notion of punctual trauma, and that of insidious trauma with its cumulative, repetitive character, will be central to the analysis set forward in the following chapters, particularly in my readings of Ann-Marie MacDonald's *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) and *Adult Onset* (2014).

2.8 Literary Representations of Trauma

Working from the premise that efforts to gain access to any objective truth surrounding the original event of trauma are futile, many trauma theorists, including Freud, turned to literature. Caruth's pioneering work has been especially influential in terms of the uptake of the paradigm of trauma within the fields of both cultural and literary studies. Gibbs suggests that "debates around belatedness, literality, and punctual versus insidious trauma have influenced literary representation and trauma criticism in an American context" (2014: 17). This has to a large extent been inaugurated by Caruth's research, which draws on deconstructive readings of Freud as well as Holocaust studies. Importantly for Caruth, trauma is, at its core, structurally *unknowable*. She writes:

> [W]hat is at the heart of Freud's writing on trauma, both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be

> linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (1991: 4)

Caruth's work emphasizes punctual, catastrophic events of trauma, rather than insidious or everyday ones. Defining an event as traumatic "to the extent that it overwhelm[s] the psychic defences and normal processes of registering memory traces" (3), she regards fragmentation and aporia as the central devices of its narration. Thus, as discussed in an earlier chapter in relation to temporality, trauma is never registered in the moment, but only belatedly. Throughout Caruth's work we find, in Roger Luckhurst's words, the central "claim that psychoanalysis and literature are particularly privileged forms of writing that can attend to these perplexing paradoxes of trauma" (Luckhurst 2008: 4). For Caruth, then, the symptoms of belatedness and amnesia which define trauma are best represented via literary and narrative strategies, including "analepses; digressions; diversions and prevarications in narrative trajectory; and dispersal or fragmenting of narrating personae" (Gibbs 2014: 17). Caruth claims that trauma "is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness", a characteristic which demands that trauma must "be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (1996: 5). Moreover, according to a Caruthian paradigm, it is not only the literary in general which best represents traumatic memory, but the literary in its most experimental or avant garde forms. My analysis of fictional representations of trauma in this dissertation is deeply influenced by Caruth's emphasis on belatedness, fragmentation, and the subsequent importance of imaginative literature in its representation. However, I extend her analysis, examining literary texts that represent, and are attentive to the interplay and ambivalence between insidious and punctual models of trauma.

Trauma, specifically childhood sexual abuse, is pervasive in lesbian narratives,

particularly those written in the 1980s and 1990s. I argue that this is representative of both the ubiquity of such experiences in the lives of women, and the influence of the era's feminist politics, which emphasized 'speaking out' and 'breaking the silence'. This trend can also be located within the context of a wider phenomenon taking place at that time, what Stephen Angelides describes as "a veritable explosion of cultural panic and alarming media reportage regarding an apparent 'crisis' of paedophilia" (2003: 80). Luckhurst points out that this phenomenon arose in part out of debates taking place at the time around the work of Freud. In 1984, Jeffrey Masson published *The Assault on Truth: Freud's Suppression of the Seduction Theory*, his interpretation of previously unpublished materials in the Freud archive. Masson cited the psychoanalyst's 1896 retraction of his claim that his female patients had all been sexually abused by their fathers as evidence of Freud's status as "a patriarch intent on suppressing the truth of women's experience" (Luckhurst 2008: 11). In conjunction with these disputes about the work of Freud, in the late 1980s a number of individuals came forward claiming to have uncovered childhood trauma via Recovered Memory Therapy (RMT). RMT was partially based on Freud's model of repressed trauma and "relied on the conviction that traumatic memory was preserved in pristine form outside conscious recall, but could be recovered complete with appropriate therapeutic intervention" (11). The sudden proliferation of recovered memories of childhood abuse led to criminal proceedings, prison sentences and vehement debates between those advocating for survivors and the validity of their claims and those who discounted RMT and the notion of repressed memory and dissociation, including official organizations, such as the "False Memory Syndrome Foundation" (1994).[30]

[30] Luckhurst (2008) cites the most iconic legal example of this to be the 1990 imprisonment of George Franklin in California. Franklin's daughter had, through therapeutic intervention, recovered repressed memories of the murder of a childhood friend from 1969. Psychiatrists Lenore Terr (1994) and Elizabeth Loftus and Katherine Ketcham (1994) debated the ability to recover repressed memories in pristine form and subsequently published popular accounts based on their involvement in the case.

This intense scrutiny of both RMT and survivors was a part of a larger backlash against the work of feminists, who had begun to figure child abuse as a structural problem of patriarchy and as one aspect of a larger spectrum of violence against women. Influential texts such as Louise Armstrong's *Kiss Daddy Goodnight* (1978), Florence Rush's *The Best Kept Secret* (1980), and Judith Herman's *Father-Daughter Incest* (1981) emerged, advancing these analyses. In response, "concern over child sexual abuse in any particular instance began to be characterized as being the likely result, not of particular acts of male violence, but of discursively generated female 'hysteria'" (Scott 2001: 353). This rise in critical and cultural interest in child abuse is particularly visible in the literary production of the time. Ian Hacking describes this effect as beginning around 1965 when 'child abuse' was first listed as a medical category in the US, and writes that "while there were no books on the topic in 1965, there were 9 in 1975. A bibliography for 1975-1980 lists 105 books in print" (1991: 269). By 1991, Hacking accounts for over 600 books in English devoted to the topic of 'child abuse', which by this time had come to signal 'sexual abuse' (274). The 1990s also witnesses the emergence of the new (sub)genre of what Luckhurst (2008) calls 'trauma memoirs', epitomized by Dave Pelzer's best-selling *A Child Called 'It'* (1995), which spawned numerous imitators and fed an apparently burgeoning public appetite for narratives of childhood abuse, sexual or otherwise. An extreme example of this sudden cultural preoccupation with childhood trauma is also evident in "a series of cases that alleged to recover extensive networks of ritual or 'satanic' abuse. At its peak, passionate advocates claimed that 50,000 babies had been murdered in black magic rituals in America" (Luckhurst 2008: 11).[31] This incited an increase not only in legal cases handling such claims, but a proliferation of popular memoirs and crime books. While in some ways child abuse can be read as a pervasive topic within lesbian narratives, it is important to acknowledge that they

[31] See, for example, Whitley Strieber (1987): *Communion*; and Lawrence Wright (1993): *Remembering Satan*.

were written against this background of increasing cultural interest and even fixation upon repressed memory and childhood abuse.

2.9 The Spectre of Lesbianism in Survivor Narratives

In exploring accounts of incest or childhood abuse within the context of literary narratives about lesbian identity, there is a danger of reinforcing or naturalizing already fraught connections. For this reason, the associations between lesbian sexual practices and sexual abuse/incest are often taboo, as Cvetkovitch observes. In *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), Cvetkovich historicizes this concern by locating it within the wider context of the emergence and medicalization of both sexual perversion and trauma. She writes: "The construction of positive gay identities has often seemed to require their differentiation from other 'perversions' or 'deviant' sexual practice, or from psychiatric classification of disease" (89). Cvetkovich connects this history with the relationship between contemporary therapeutic cultures directed at survivors of incest and abuse on the one hand and lesbianism on the other. She focuses particularly on the tension between the feminist investment in testimony and a reluctance to reinforce the associations between lesbianism and historical abuse. As an example, Cvetkovich turns to Ellen Bass and Laura Davis' now classic 1988 book, *The Courage to Heal*, written for survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Although lesbians are heavily represented in the book, particularly through personal narratives and testimonies, their presence is a "ghostly" one, implied but largely unstated. Cvetkovich describes, for example, her surprise that the text makes no "mention of the relationship between coming out as a 'lesbian' and coming out as an 'incest survivor,' especially since the latter is formulated as a category of (sexual) identity, and since both kinds of coming out can be so devastating to families […]" (ibid.). If this connection between different modes of 'coming

out' is indeed, as Cvetkovich claims, underemphasized in *The Courage to Heal* and other similar texts, this is not, as the following chapters will show, the case in literary fiction.

Reflecting on an article about *The Courage to Heal* published in the popular gay lifestyle and politics magazine *The Advocate*,[32] Cvetkovich claims that the primary connection made between lesbianism and incest is one of disavowal. The connections between lesbianism and historical abuse have been overemphasized in ways ranging from the medicalization of trauma and sexuality to the common assumption that lesbian identity is the symptom of a history of sexual abuse. Cvetkovich acknowledges this: "I don't want to underestimate the many strategic reasons there are to avoid the lure of trying to identify the causes of homosexuality and to ward off bad versions of the associations between incest and lesbian […]" (ibid.). However, she points out that in spite of this attempt to downplay the presence of lesbianism in the text, "*The Courage to Heal* has been disparaged as teaching women to be lesbians and man haters by readers who have found the spectre of lesbianism entirely too present in the text" (ibid.). This tension is abundantly evident in fictional and non-fictional texts wherein survivors relate a feeling of reluctance to disclose childhood sexual abuse because of the fear of their sexuality being pathologized as a symptom of the abuse. For example, in *The Way the Crow Flies*, protagonist Madeleine tells her therapist that she is reluctant to disclose her abuse to her mother, because she expects that her mother will consider it the cause of her lesbianism. Likewise, in *Adult Onset*, the protagonist's mother repeatedly asks if she was abused during her homophobic verbal attacks.

In this section I have traced the development of theories of trauma, demonstrating the entanglements among feminist politics and activism and therapeutic culture. In describing the distinction between punctual and insidious forms of trauma, and in

[32] Liz Galst (1991): "Overcoming the Silence: Lesbians Lead the Recovery Movement for Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse".

foregrounding the literary as a particularly effective way of attending to the perplexing paradoxes of trauma's temporality, I have set out some of the primary ways through which I engage with my primary texts in the following chapters. It is against this background – as well as the that of the of cultural panic around childhood abuse and of claim and counter-claim in relation to repressed memories of abuse – that lesbian narratives of the 1980s and 1990s were written, and out of this historical context that they continue to emerge. In the analysis that follows, I think about the ways in which such narratives have shifted in relation to the increasing formal legal equality of gays and lesbians, and the emergence of queer and post-feminist politics.

Trauma, and memories of trauma, thus become part of the literary archive in ways that mark the centrality of time. Personal traumas of the past meet political ruptures of the present. Discomfiting affects are aroused by political events that might presume to be seen solely through the lens of positivity and progress. It is these paradoxical negotiations of time – of history and memory, and expectation and anticipation – that sometimes uncomfortably bring together the lesbian literary archive with the lesbian archive of trauma. The queer theories of temporality, futurity and negativity that I have charted in this chapter point to queerness as something that is capable of, indeed conceived for, such awkward transitions and proximities. As the next chapter will show, however, lesbian feminism has also been a site of such conception; thus, the theoretical concentrations and impulses that characterise queer theory, and are seen to begin with and even belong to it, find their roots in another time and place.

3 Utopian Configurations of Lesbianism

3.1 Introduction

Perhaps more than any other identity category, lesbianism has been variously and insistently constructed as functioning utopically.[33] According to Annamarie Jagose, "feminism, and no less lesbian feminism, like any political movement with an agenda of social transformation and revolution, might be described as approaching a utopian destination" (1994: 2). While I agree with Jagose in her articulation of the "utopian destination" of lesbian feminism, I would argue that it has undergone a series of particularized utopian constructions differentiating it from other political movements. Moving from early associations between lesbianism and female romantic friendship to explicit propositions of lesbian separatism, I will trace in this chapter some of the theoretical, political, and literary articulations of lesbianism as being situated "outside the mechanisms of power" (ibid.). More specifically, I will consider the conflation of lesbian activity with feminist consciousness and transformative politics through an analysis of its frequent manifestation in narratives of childhood sexual abuse in lesbian-feminist fiction.

3.2 Historicizing the Utopian Category of Lesbianism

Although not always explicit or easily decipherable through a contemporary lens, representations of erotic connections between women can be found in diverse texts from all literary periods. Over the past decades, numerous scholars have theorized critical and complex ways of approaching the historical project of identifying configurations of same-

[33] My usage of the term 'utopia' across this dissertation does not refer specifically to a formal genre or political category, but rather to a more general idealized social or political imaginary.

sex desire in the past.[34] The earliest incarnations of such scholarship exposed the idealization of relationships between women as having a long historical tradition. Lilian Faderman's now-classic book, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love Between Women, from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981), attempted to identify forms of romantic love between women from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Faderman claims that because of the disavowal of women's sexual subjectivities, passionate love between women was not pathologized, but rather accepted and commonly practiced.[35] Passionate love between women was not viewed as a threat because women's sexualities were not considered serious. This is evidenced by the fact that in Britain, for example, gay male sex was illegal while lesbian sex was not. These legal inconsistencies thus expose a paradox: the invisibility of female sexualities in some ways facilitated the practice of lesbian sex. Faderman describes "romantic friendship" as a "widely recognized, tolerated social institution before our century," and claims that "women were, in fact, expected to seek out kindred spirits and form strong bonds" (411).[36] Such idealized conceptions of attachments between women, such as within the context of romantic friendship, form the historical backdrop to this chapter, which will focus on more recent utopic configurations of lesbianism, beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s when lesbianism took on specific cultural, sexual, and political meaning.[37] This is also the time period from which I begin my literary analysis.

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[34] See, for example, the work of Valerie Traub (2002, 2015); David Halperin (1990, 1995, 2000); and Carolyn Dinshaw (1999, 2012).

[35] Other examples include Esther Rothblum (1993): *Boston Marriages: Romantic but Asexual Relationships among Contemporary Lesbians*; Leila J. Rupp (2009): *Sapphistries: A Global History of Love Between Women*; and Martha Vicinus (2004): *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women, 1778-1928*.

[36] Although a notable example, romantic friendship is not the only historical framework within which representations of erotic connections between women have been located. Scholars such as Masterson, Rabinowitz, and Robson (2015) and Carolyn Dinshaw (1999) have, for example, looked to antiquity and medieval times to explore diverse representations of same-sex desire.

[37] For critiques of Faderman, see Terry Castle (1993); Lisa Moore (1992); and Vicinus (1992). Faderman's work, though groundbreaking in both its breadth and specificity, has been criticized, for example, for the ways in which it obscures the embodied sexual dimensions of relationships between women.

3.3 The Emergence of Political Lesbian Feminism

Lesbian feminism emerged in part as a response to the exclusion of lesbians from the mainstream feminist and gay liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Although lesbians were heavily represented and active within these movements, their particular issues and interests were often marginalized or outright denied.[38] Frustrated by the sexism of the male-dominated gay liberation groups and the disavowal of lesbians by members of the mainstream women's movement who feared that a conflation of lesbianism and feminism would hurt their cause, lesbian feminists contended that lesbians and lesbian feminism should occupy a central position in feminist politics.[39] Influential publications of the time, such as the Radicalesbians' foundational manifesto "The Woman-Identified Woman" (1970), Charlotte Bunch's article "Lesbians in Revolt" (1972), and Jill Johnston's book *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (1973), positioned lesbian women as being at the forefront of the struggle for equality:

[38] In 1970, Betty Friedan, the President of the National Organization of Women (NOW), described those women advocating for the inclusion of lesbian issues as a "lavender menace". In response, Gloria Steinem argued that feminism was a revolution, not a public relations movement. In 1971, NOW members voted in favour of acknowledging the marginalization of lesbians as a feminist concern.

[39] This concern regarding the conflation of feminism with lesbianism, or the displacement of social anxieties about gender roles onto the figure of the lesbian, was by this time not a new phenomenon. Various scholars (e.g. Valerie Traub, Susan Lanser, and Sally O'Driscoll) have described the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century as a time of increasing anxiety around issues of gender as the project of domestic heterosexuality was being consolidated. Traub points out that one can mark a discursive shift in this period from the "insignificance attributed to chaste female love to the erotic significance associated with a range of female social types: tribades, masculine females, macroclitorides, female husbands, tommies, sapphists, lesbians" (2002: 322-323). Furthermore, at the turn of the twentieth century, those women supporting suffrage were accused of sexual deviance and same-sex proclivities. Propaganda lobbying against women's suffrage warned that the elective franchise would strip women of their femininity. During the early and mid-twentieth century, as gender roles shifted and expanded according to the necessities of wartime, attempts were made to contain female sexuality by correlating same-sex desire with criminalized practices such as prostitution. Such perceived incommensurability of feminism and femininity continues in the present day, particularly within postfeminist narratives that see the work of feminism (that is, of achieving gender equality in the West) as being done. Various scholars have pointed out the ways in which feminists who counter this claim, or who feel that feminism might have an agenda outside of or in addition to formal legal equality, are maligned as angry, humourless, and generally undermining of men and masculinity. (see Susan Faludi [1992]; Angela McRobbie [2004]; Clare Hemmings [2011]). Hemmings writes: "The stereotype of the feminist subject here […] is familiar. She is masculine, unattractive to men, prudish, humourless, and badly dressed: in short, she is a lesbian" (2011: 8).

> Women in the movement have in most cases gone to great lengths to avoid discussion and confrontation with the issue of lesbianism […]. But it is not a side issue. It is absolutely essential to the success of fulfilment of the women's liberation movement that this issue be dealt with. As long as the label 'dyke' can be used to frighten women into a less militant stand, keep her separate from her sisters, keep her from giving primacy to anything other than men and family – then to that extent she is controlled by the male culture. Until women see in each other the possibility of a primal commitment which includes sexual love, they will be denying themselves the love and value they readily accord to men, thus affirming their second-class status. (Radicalesbians 2006 [1970]: 2)

Around this time, lesbians began to articulate and contest their exclusion from the supposedly unifying category of "sisterhood". Many of these dialogues around exclusion came out of the women of colour feminist movement, whose work both criticized the ways in which mainstream feminism was divided along lines of race, class, and sexuality, and explored and celebrated a politics of difference as essential to the project of liberation.[40] Clare Hemmings points out the ways in which the progress narrative of Western feminism often positions lesbian feminists and feminists of colour in opposition to one another, a move which both conflates radical feminism and lesbian feminism, and ignores the fact that the women of colour articulating such critiques were very often *lesbian* women of colour (2011: 53).[41] Lesbian feminists understood the categories of "lesbian" and "homosexual" not exclusively as an expression of any fundamental gender or sexual identity, but rather as the

[40] See, for example, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott and Barbara Smith (1982): *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*; Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981): *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*.

[41] Hemmings argues that "this linear account of feminist development also provides the perfect alibi for implicit or explicit homophobia in both feminist and postfeminist accounts, marking lesbian feminist politics as particularly inattentive to racial exclusion historically, and therefore as ignorable on those grounds" (2011: 54).

result of patriarchal heterosexuality, as "[categories] of behaviour possible only in a sexist society characterized by rigid sex roles and dominated by male supremacy" (Radicalesbians 2006 [1970]: 232). They contended that "[i]n a society in which men do not oppress women, and sexual expression is allowed to follow feelings, the categories of homosexuality and heterosexuality would disappear" (ibid.). In addition, many lesbian feminists did not necessarily articulate lesbian identity as being determined by sexual practice, but rather insisted on the importance of women withdrawing sexual energy from men and refocusing it on their own lives and on the larger women's movement. Sexual relationships among women were not necessarily prioritized as much as more diffuse commitments to the self and to other women. Anticipating Adrienne Rich's later theorizing of lesbian existence, Radicalesbians wrote:

> Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors […] It is the primacy of women relating to women, of women creating new consciousness of and with each other, which is at the heart of the women's liberation, and the basis for the cultural revolution. Together we must find, reinforce, and validate our authentic selves. (236)

For lesbian feminists, then, women's liberation could only be achieved via a critique of heterosexuality as a fundamental mechanism of patriarchy, and a commitment to resisting male domination in both the public and private spheres.

As I discussed in my introduction, the principles expressed in the early writings of lesbian feminist groups such as Radicalesbians influenced Rich's term "compulsory heterosexuality," which articulates the ways in which heterosexuality functions not as a preference or orientation, but rather as an "ideological regime maintained by a complex web of cultural, economic, and psychological forces intended to maintain male supremacy" (1980: 637). Proposing the terms "lesbian continuum" and "lesbian existence" in lieu of

what she found to be the "clinical and limiting ring" of the term "lesbianism" (20), Rich echoed earlier work of lesbian feminists who framed female heterosexuality as historically and culturally entangled with violence against women. Within this context, lesbian sociality was theorized as a means of producing forms of intimacy external to such violent power dynamics. As discussed earlier, critics of Rich's notion of a "lesbian continuum" objected to the desexualisation of lesbian identity, arguing that it is erotic desire that distinguishes lesbianism from other forms of intimacy such as friendship.

It was not only lesbian feminists who understood heterosexuality as rooted in patriarchy and as a source of women's oppression. This topic was at the heart of the feminist "sex wars" of the 1980s, during which feminists vehemently debated the issue of how to address sexual violence and oppression while still attending to women's sexual pleasure.[42] Discursive conflicts about topics such as BDSM and pornography polarized feminists who became divided into two sides frequently categorized as "pro-sex" versus "anti-pornography" feminists, or "radical" versus "sex-radical" feminists.[43] The category of lesbian became central in these debates, either "held up by the anti-pornography side as the utopic figure for a reciprocal sexuality of equality least distorted by the reach of male sexual violence" or, conversely, "by the pro-sex side as an outlaw figure of sexual dissidence animated by principles of autonomy and pleasure" (Jagose 2015: 34). The question of lesbian sadomasochism in particular was highly controversial. Heather Love writes:

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[42] In its more extreme form, radical lesbian feminism called for a complete rejection of heterosexual intercourse, claiming that consensual relations between men and women under patriarchy are impossible. Andrea Dworkin, for example, states that "in a world of male power – penile power – fucking is the essential sexual experience of power and potency and possession; fucking by mortal men, regular guys" (1987: 124). Dworkin describes sexual intercourse in violent terms, writing that, "[h]e has to push in past boundaries … The thrusting is persistent invasion. She is opened up, split down the centre. She is occupied – physically, internally, in her privacy" (122). For Catherine MacKinnon, "[t]he male supremacist definition of female sexuality [constructs it] as a lust for self-annihilation" (1987: 172).

[43] For further discussions of the sex wars and the positioning of lesbians within them, see, for example, Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter (1995): *Sex Wars; Sexual Dissent and Political Culture*); Gayle Rubin (1994): "The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M" as well as Rubin with Judith Butler (1994): "Interview: Sexual Traffic".

> Anyone with a taste for soft-core porn would be unfazed by the idea that lesbians like to taste the whip every once in a while, but such practices were not exactly what lesbian-feminist critics had in mind when they described love between women as surpassing the love of men. Since lesbians' raison d'être in the 1970s was to bust women out of the constraints of patriarchy, the architects of the lesbian nation did not have much use for women who like to humiliate their sisters rather than empower them. (2000: 103)

Lesbian identity thus functioned utopically for those on both sides of the debate. However, what has maintained saliency has been the representation of lesbian feminists as anti-sex and anti-pornography, both of which continue to work as signifiers of the lesbian feminist as the prudish killjoy of feminist sex positivity.

3.4 "French Feminism" and Lesbianism

Another flashpoint in historical figurations of "lesbian" as "outside the mechanisms of power" can be located in the theorizing of French feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig.[44] In their figuration of the lesbian as exterior to, or transcendent of, classificatory models of sex and gender, Irigaray and Kristeva diverge from the predominantly material and political mobilizations of lesbianism outlined above, instead elaborating female sexuality via various interpretations of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacanian theory understands the emergence of meaningful language and experience as facilitated by the rupture that occurs between the pre-Oedipal stage of psychological

[44] The intellectual category "French Feminism" has been critiqued by various theorists. Christine Delphy, for example, describes "French Feminism" as an "Anglo-American fabrication" which has little to do with actual feminisms in France (1995: 195). Indeed, for Delphy, the invention of "French Feminism" can be understood as an ideological intervention, through which perspectives such as homophobia and essentialism, which are in fact antithetical to the politics of feminism, could be introduced into the canon of legitimate feminist theorizing.

development and what Lacan terms "the Symbolic". For Lacan, the pre-Oedipal stage is the maternal realm, characterized by a "libidinal chaos" in which the infant exists in a dependent and undifferentiated relationship with the mother. The "subject", then, emerges as a consequence of the repression of the primary libidinal drives. Within the symbolic world, linguistic signification is structured by the law of the father, and a multiplicity of meanings is replaced by "univocal and discrete meanings" (Butler 1990: 79), "ordered by binary oppositions and by gender difference" (ibid.). While the subject necessarily becomes a bearer of the repressive paternal law, the pre-Oedipal or maternal stage, which Kristeva calls "the semiotic," remains in the subconscious of the subject and of language itself. According to Kristeva, following the rejection of the mother and the move away from her into the world of language, culture, the social, and meaning, the subject may continue to move between the Symbolic and semiotic. It is within this semiotic realm of the maternal that Kristeva locates the potential for the subversion of the repressive order of the Symbolic, theorizing the lesbian body as pre-linguistic and aligned with the semiotic rather than the Symbolic. However, Kristeva's articulation of the transformative potential of lesbianism is ambivalent, and, in "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" (1975), "far from signalling a potential liberatory space," Kristeva's conceptualization of "female homosexuality, excluded from the coherence of the Symbolic's paternal law, is overwhelmingly associated with psychosis and regression" (Jagose 1994: 3). Thus, as Judith Butler points out, even if we accept Kristeva's theory, the return to the semiotic can only ever serve as a "temporary and futile disruption of the hegemony of the paternal law" (1990: 81), thus marking it as an inadequate method of sustained political resistance.

Like Kristeva, Irigaray announces the emancipatory potential of lesbianism only to

ultimately exclude it. In "When Our Lips Speak Together" (1977),[45] Irigaray describes the lesbian body as representing an essential femininity that lies outside of the phallocentric order, thus facilitating not only an "autonomous female sexuality, which escapes the heterosexual commodification of femininity" but also "the possibility of a new women's language isomorphic with her perceived erotic relations" (Jagose 1994: 29). Irigaray's theorization of the lesbian body has been characterized as restoring to the woman and particularly the woman writer both her relationship to herself and a new relationship with language, inviting women to shift from a position within the phallocentric order to one outside of it. She writes: "Come out of their language. Try to go back thorough the names they've given you. I'll wait for you. I'm waiting for myself. Come back. It's not so hard" (1985 [1977]: 205-206). Not only does Irigaray position the lesbian body as the authentic female body existing outside of phallocentric representation, but she also considers it representative of a pre-discursive, authentically feminine *language*, offering the possibilities for the emancipatory restructuring of categories of masculinity and femininity. She writes that "[i]f we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as we have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves" (205). However, in her reification of masculinity and the heterosexual couple, Irigaray also represents the feminine as entirely excluded from the phallocentric system. While male (homo)sexuality is associated with identity, female homosexuality is located as outside of desire and subjectivity, and as a "hybridized form of autoeroticism and a pre-Oedipal identification with the body of the (m)other" (Jagose 1994: 33). As opposed to Simone de Beauvoir, for example, who positions the feminine as the negative to the neutral or positive of the masculine, in both *The Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which is*

[45] "When Our Lips Speak Together" appears as the final essay in Irigaray's 1977 collection *This Sex Which is Not One*.

Not One (1977), Irigaray articulates the masculine system as closed and complete, containing both sides of the binary system, and excluding the possibility of feminine representation. Thus, the phallocentric economy, despite being reliant on a system of binarily opposed terms, remains an economy of the same.

The work of Kristeva and Irigaray has been widely criticized, and their ambivalent positioning of the feminine body as simultaneously subversive and abject can be read as not only theoretically problematic, but homophobic. However, their work is important within the context of this dissertation, not only because it necessarily belongs to any project of historicizing configurations of lesbianism as functioning utopically, but also because their focus on the centrality of discourse and the linguistic to subject formation facilitates a foregrounding of textuality in any project of political resistance. In a dissertation concerned primarily with the literary, these perspectives provide a useful counterpoint to the more material and political conceptualizations of lesbian feminism foregrounded by feminists such as Rich.

Monique Wittig's polemical declaration that "lesbians are not women," published in the journal *Questions Féministes* in 1980, marks her theorizations as distinct from those I have described above. Unlike Kristeva and Irigaray, for whom the lesbian body occupies a pre-linguistic space, the term "lesbian" constitutes, for Wittig, a third category displacing both "man" and woman". She writes:

> Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject (lesbian) is *not* a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically. For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation which we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation […] a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay

> heterosexual. We are escapees from our class in the same way as the American runaway slaves were when escaping slavery and becoming free. (1992: 20)

Wittig's political agenda, then, calls for the destruction of the categories of sex, a destruction that she views as being ultimately facilitated by the very existence of the category lesbian, because of its challenge to the presumed naturalness of the category of woman. In her article "When Lesbians Were Not Women" (2005), Teresa de Lauretis acknowledges Wittig's work not only as having been deeply influential in terms of her own thinking, but as producing a historical shift – a new conceptual space for imagining the figure of lesbian, a practice which she describes as being "based on the lived experience of one's body, one's desire, one's conceptual and psychical dis-identification from the straight mind […] aware of the power of discourse to shape one's social and subjective […] reality" (52).[46] However, Wittig has also been critiqued for the ways in which her positioning of the lesbian as essentially transgressive ultimately reinforces and becomes complicit with the categories she hopes to transcend. Butler claims that Wittig advances an understanding of heterosexuality as more intelligible and forceful than it actually is (1990: 121). Jagose uses a Foucauldian analysis of power to critique the ways in which Kristeva, Irigaray, and Wittig locate the lesbian body as "exterior to cultural legislation" (1993: 278). Rather than making a distinction between the body and technologies of power, Jagose claims that the lesbian body must be understood as "discursively constructed, a cultural text, on the surface of which the constantly changing, and even contradictory, possible, possible meanings of 'lesbian,' are inscribed and resisted" (1994: 160).

[46] Here, de Lauretis also condemns Butler's well-known critique of Wittig, writing that: "[Butler] tossed [Wittig's] theory in the dump of surpassed and discarded philosophies […] [T]o the reader of *Gender Trouble*, Wittig appears to be an existentialist who believes in human freedom, a humanist who presumes the ontological unity of Being prior to language, an idealist masquerading as a materialist, and most paradoxically of all, an unintentional, unwitting collaborator with the regime of heterosexual normativity" (57). de Lauretis goes on to claim that Butler's (mis)reading of Wittig had dire consequences, contributing to "the relative disregard or condescension in which Wittig's work has been held in gender and queer studies […]" (ibid.).

3.5 Political Transformation and Literary Form

The final example of the subversiveness attributed to lesbianism that I will examine in this section is a distinctly literary one. The role of writing within contemporary lesbian history is significant, particularly in the form of the coming out story. Texts such as *The Coming Out Stories* (1980), edited by Julia Penelope and Susan Wolfe, and *The Lesbian Path* (1980), edited by Margaret Cruikshank, were the first to foreground life narratives written by lesbians themselves. In her article "Exiting from Patriarchy: The Lesbian Novel of Development" (1983), Bonnie Zimmerman appropriates the genre of the *Bildungsroman* in order to make an association between the transformative potential of lesbianism and literary form. According to Zimmerman, the *Bildungsroman* takes the forms of a coming out narrative, whereby the protagonist moves towards the goal of realizing her authentic and true self, that is, her 'essential' lesbian identity. For Zimmerman, rather than the geographic journey undertaken by the protagonist of a classic *Bildungsroman*,

> the provinces in the lesbian novel of development can be interpreted as the territory of patriarchy, and the journey/quest undertaken by the lesbian protagonist is toward the new world of lesbianism […]. Along her path she is educated socially, sexually, and emotionally, often within the environs of an all-female world where the young girl awakens to her true identity, her powers, and her sexuality. (1983: 245-6)

Jagose argues that Zimmerman's position can be paralleled with that of Wittig, in its positioning of lesbianism as outside of the mechanisms of power, "unimplicated in the categories of sex and therefore instrumental in their overthrow" (1993: 285). However, she goes on to critique both Wittig and Zimmerman, particularly for "the subversiveness they attribute to the category 'lesbian'" (287). Other feminists question whether the *Bildungsroman* tradition, within which the achievement of maturity is measured through the

masculinist experiences of individualism and independence, can ever authentically "represent the developmental goals of women, or of women characters" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 1983: 11).[47] In her book *Narratives of Queer Desire: Deserts of the Heart* (2009), Margaret Sönser Breen makes a connection between the lesbian novel and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678; 1684), whose basic narrative structure depicts life as a spiritual journey. Reading *The Pilgrim's Progress* against Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and Jane Hall's *Desert of the Heart* (1964), Sönser Breen claims that not only are these novels clearly informed by the progress novel tradition, but that their influence as canonical works of lesbian fiction has meant that contemporary works such as Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (1985) and Sarah Waters' *Tipping the Velvet* (1998) continue to be influenced by Bunyan's classic and the progress novel in general.

The notion of a lesbian *Bildungsroman* is convincing within the framework of the coming out narrative. However, the novel is not the only form that such narratives take. Texts such as Michelle Cliff's *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* (1980), Audre Lorde's *Zami* (1983), Cherríe Moraga's *Loving in the War Years* (1983), Mab Segrest's *My Mama's Dead Squirrel* (1985), Gloria Anzaldúa's *Border-Lands/La Frontera* (1987), Joan Nestle's *A Restricted Country* (1987), Nicole Brossard's *The Aerial Letter* (1988), Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993), and Dionne Brand's *Bread Out of Stone* (1994) take the form of poetry, essays, and theory. Critics such as Marilyn Frye (1980) have criticized the coming out narrative as a limiting and prescriptive form that designates an appropriate way of embodying lesbian identity. Frye claims that such narratives tend to exclude those experiences that do not fit within this narrow framework. In addition, early critiques of coming out narratives pointed out that they focused primarily on the experiences

[47] While Northrop Frye, for example, claimed that genre exists independently of gender, it has been established that certain literary forms tend to be understood as male or female (Fraiman 1993: 2). In her work *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and The Novel of Development* (1993), Susan Fraiman writes that: "The *Bildungsroman* has been defined in terms of works by, about, and appealing to men" (3).

of white, middle-class, able-bodied women. Following the publication of Moraga and Anzaldúa's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), a number of lesbian life narratives took into consideration the complex intersections of sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class. Texts such as *Nice Jewish Girls* (1989), edited by Evelyn Torton Beck; *Companeras: Latina Lesbians* (1994), edited by Juanita Ramos; *Out of the Class Closet* (1994), edited by Julia Penelope; and *Afrekete* (1995), edited by Catherine E. McKinley and L. Joyce DeLaney were significant in that they contributed more diverse representations of lesbian identity in coming out narratives.

The reification of lesbianism as fundamentally transformative, subversive, or as occupying a space exterior to cultural or Symbolic legislation, has by now been extensively critiqued. It has been marked within the progress narrative of academic and political feminism as an essentializing identity politic rendered anachronistic by queer theory's emphasis on the performativity and fluidity of gender itself. Judith Roof claims that in "[rejecting] the oppressive patterns of heterosexual relations", the lesbian feminism of the 1970s and 1980s "overvalued a gender essentialism that in the end only reified the very system it wished to critique" (1998: 28). For Jagose, "the category 'lesbian' is not essentially radical or subversive. Indeed the category 'lesbian' is not essentially anything" (1993: 286). I agree with critiques of essentializing claims about the inherently transgressive nature of lesbianism, particularly those forms that have produced, for example, a narrow definition of the category "woman," leading to exclusionary and transphobic politics. However, in this project I resist the totalizing tendency to ignore the diverse perspectives and interventions made by lesbian feminists and to disavow both their historical and potential contributions to contemporary feminist and queer politics.

As I have discussed in previous chapters, figures (such as the figure of the lesbian) do specific kinds of work, constituting and reconstituting meanings within specific political,

social, and cultural contexts. In addition, while the "utopian destination[s]" (Jagose 1994: 2) of political movements are rarely coherent or stable, this does not make them any less vital in their capacity to inspire transformation through the imaginative potential of their field of vision. While "lesbian" may be a "sign that perpetually fails to signify in any satisfying way" (Medd 2015: 1) – a figure who fails to be consistently transgressive and, indeed, as Jagose claims, fails to be "essentially anything" – I would argue that this does not mean that she isn't essentially *something*. In this project, I propose that one might recognize the category of lesbian as culturally constructed and acknowledge the challenging implications of her complicated history, without discarding the projects of transformation that have been envisioned through her, or the complex ways through which she has been put to work in literary texts as a figure. Works of imagination – even utopic or fantastically idealized imagination – are central to any project of political transformation. The contemporary moment is defined by contestation and negotiation over forms of queer identity and resistance. In this context, revisiting the site of lesbian feminism does not only provide a historicization of such struggles. Something more meaningful can be found in lesbianism's configuration as a means by which we can imagine different ways of doing intimacy through which we can enact social and political transformation.

3.6 Butch-Femme Narratives

In her introduction to the collection *butch/femme: Inside Lesbian Gender* (1998), Sally Munt points out that butch and femme are perhaps the most publicly legible forms of lesbian gender and self-representation, having "facilitated lesbian sex, lesbian desire, for decades" (4). In *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadomasochism*, also published in 1998, Lynda Hart gives an account of pre-Stonewall, working-class lesbian culture, claiming that

rather than identifying as lesbian, women during that time more commonly identified themselves as either butch or femme, adopting the gender codes of either masculinity or femininity. However, butch-femme became increasingly unpopular in the late 1960s and early 1970s, disavowed by the generation of feminists emerging from the women's movement. Widely perceived as heterosexist role-playing, butch-femme was seen as reinforcing the rigid gender norms attached to femininity and masculinity from which feminists were trying to liberate themselves. During this time, lesbian identity increasingly became associated with the notion of the woman-identified-woman.[48] Thus, by foregrounding sameness both in terms of gender and in terms of the shared experience of living under patriarchy, butch-femme was seen as politically anachronistic as well as associated with the working class.[49]

Butch-femme writings are an important site of analysis within the historical archive of queer literatures that incorporate the topic of sexual abuse and trauma. Texts such as Nestle's *A Restricted Country* (1987) and *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader* (1992), and Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy's *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold* (1993) openly discuss experiences of incest and abuse, acknowledging the ways in which such experiences have impacted their sexual identities and lives. Ann Cvetkovich claims that such writing is meaningful in that it "depathologizes the relation between trauma and sexuality, but [doesn't] necessarily refuse it" (2003: 52). Foregrounding hierarchies between passivity and activity, femininity and masculinity, and trauma and recovery, butch-femme narratives trouble assumptions about the complexities and ambivalences of the relationship

[48] Love describes this humorously as "the 'woman-identified-woman': that gentle, androgynous, sexually moderate figure who functioned as a feminist mascot" (2000: 103).
[49] For more on the relationship between butch-femme and class, see, for example: Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy (1986): "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York, 1940 – 1960"; Lillian Faderman (1991): *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century American*; and Nestle (1992): *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*.

between power and vulnerability.[50] Idealizations of lesbian sex as non-hierarchical, free of penetration, pain, fear, or shame are complicated by butch-femme writings that "reframe a conception of the violation of bodily boundaries as traumatic by suggesting the opening the body and, by extension, the self to the experience of being vulnerable is both welcome and difficult, and hence profoundly transformative" (66). Cvetkovich uses the formulation of femme desire as "active passivity", claiming that Nestle and other women who identify as femme reclaim and complicate straightforward assumptions about qualities attached to femininity such as vulnerability and receptivity, reframing them as strengths.[51] Cvetkovich points out the impact that butch-femme identities and cultures have had on queer theory and claims that butch-femme facilitates a connection between queer theory and trauma theory, "in butch-femme's unpredictable relations between gender, sexual, and bodily presentations" (52).

While lesbian feminists of the 1960s and 1970s repudiated butch-femme as counter to the utopian projects that they believed were facilitated by lesbian existence, Cvetkovich positions the intimate spaces of butch-femme as transformative in that they question and break down the presumed associations between penetration, domination, and trauma, opening space for different forms of strength and vulnerability. Queer sexuality makes room for trauma, and for shame and perversion, rather than "purging them of their messiness in

[50] For a discussion of the relationship between butch-femme and bisexuality, see Hemmings (1998). Problematizing the exclusion of bisexual identity from butch-femme discourse, Hemmings writes: "Given these dominant representations of bisexuality as beyond and/or inclusive of male/female and masculine/feminine, it is easy to see how a bisexual femme subject position might be read as a contradiction in terms, if not an impossibility. In the above images, femme or butch figure as incomplete parts of the sexed and gendered bisexual 'whole'. It comes as no great surprise, then, that recent writings by femmes such as Joan Nestle still code bisexuality negatively, or that as an 'out' bisexual, I am frequently asked by lesbian femmes or butches 'do bisexuals do butch-femme?' The phrasing of the question itself assumes there is no such thing as bisexual butch or femme subjectivity. Even if the answer to the question is 'yes, bisexuals do butch-femme,' this is an affirmation of a gender play. Bisexuals are not seen as ontologically gendered, as able to *be* butch or femme" (91).

[51] For further interventions into the dynamics of butch-femme, see: Amber Hollibaugh and Moraga (1983): "What We're Rollin Around in Bed With: Sexual Silences in Feminism"; and Davis and Kennedy (1986): "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community".

order to make them acceptable" (63). Butler also connects butch-femme with queer sexuality, proposing that we think not of ways in which butch-femme is contaminated by heterosexuality, but rather of the potential for butch-femme to transform understandings and embodiments of heterosexuality. Arguing against the impulse to maintain the purity of identity, she writes that it "is imperative to theorize from a perspective that does not fear contamination and, hence, is not driven by the need to purify one's desire of all traces of the opposition" (1998: 227). The forms of intimacy that I examine in the forthcoming chapters might all be read as "messy". The work of butch-femme writers allows for ways of negotiating the often blurry boundaries among desire, shame, and violence.

3.7 Abuse Narratives in Lesbian Fiction

Sexual abuse and incest are common themes in lesbian fiction. Within these narratives, lesbian existence or sexuality often offers the protagonist the possibility of self-determination or escape from violent circumstances. In this section, I claim that such narratives represent one specific literary manifestation of the political and theoretical configurations of lesbianism-as-utopic discussed above. I provide the background for what I frame as a common structure for describing experiences of abuse within the framework of lesbian literature. Considering this literary archive through the lenses of trauma theory, therapeutic culture, and lesbian utopics offers a productive means through which to explore the reification of lesbianism or lesbian existence as a site evacuated of the violent power dynamics that are framed as inherent to intimate relationships within patriarchy. If in this section I show how, in fiction, the lesbian is frequently positioned in the vicinity of sexualized violence, this is not to reinforce already problematic conflations between abuse and lesbian sexuality. Rather, I consider it to be representative of the fact that women,

particularly queer women in a patriarchal society, are always located in close proximity to violence.

Moving away from the figure of the "tragic lesbian" found in canonical texts such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936), and the genre of the pulp fiction novel, which had become a common site of lesbian representation in the first half of the twentieth century a more explicitly lesbian literature emerged in the 1970s. Not only were lesbians writing and publishing more narratives about their own experiences, but, reflecting the wider context of the Women's Liberation Movement, lesbian writing began to take on a more overtly political voice. Through their emphasis on personal-political dynamics, and interventions such as consciousness raising and speaking out, second-wave feminists were drawing attention to the ways in which women encountered violence in their intimate and public lives. This emerged in the era's fiction and non-fiction, within which violence and abuse were frequently thematized.

Across Toni Morrison's oeuvre, for example, we can see the foregrounding of female intimacies and experiences through the depictions of the lives of women who endure diverse forms of violence ranging from the structural (poverty and racism) to the domestic (abuse and rape). The example of Morrison's work draws out the complex interplay of sexual trauma, gendered shame, and race; in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), for instance, incest and sexual violence go hand in hand with racial self-hatred, where a desire for whiteness is manifested through a yearning for the blue eyes that stand in for racially-structured standards of beauty. In her essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (2000 [1977]), Barbara Smith claims that Morrison's first two novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* (1973), can be read as lesbian novels. Smith's essay inaugurated an examination of the significance of the lesbian within the African-American literary tradition. In it, she recounts Bertha Harris' presentation on "Lesbians and Literature" at the 1976 Modern Language Association convention. Harris

claimed that if, "in a woman writer's work a sentence refuses to do what it is supposed to do, if there are strong images of women and if there is a refusal to be linear, the result is innately lesbian literature" (Smith 2000 [1977]: 138). Smith extends Harris' analysis to the writing of Black women writers, coming to the conclusion that, according to Harris' formulation, much of it could be considered lesbian. "Not because women are 'lovers,'" she writes, "but because they are the central figures, are positively portrayed and have pivotal relationships with one another. The form and language of these works are also nothing like what white patriarchal culture requires or expects" (2013: 9). Thus, although Morrison's female protagonists may not be explicitly lesbian, they can be read as such because of the centrality of their relationships with other women. The foregrounding of precisely these relationships is what, in Morrison's work, enables her to defy patriarchal literary traditions.

In 1982, Alice Walker published her epistolary novel, *The Color Purple*. Set in the American South in the 1930s, the novel's fourteen-year-old protagonist Celie is the victim of her father's physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Having been impregnated by her father several times, she eventually gives birth to, and gives away, two children. Celie's only comfort is in the letters that she writes to God and her close relationship with her sister, Nettie. The novel foregrounds the lives of African-American women who, despite living under the conditions of poverty, racism, and abuse, survive because of the meaningful and sustaining bonds that they form with one another. Celie escapes her father, but only via marriage to another abusive man, Mister, and estrangement from her beloved sister. However, her circumstances finally change when she encounters Mister's long-time mistress and the love of his life, the glamourous jazz singer Shug Avery. Although their relationship is antagonistic at first, Shug and Celie begin a sexual relationship and fall in love. Shug validates and cares for Celie, using her influence over Mister to insist that he stop the abuse. Celie's relationship with Shug allows her to overcome the violence endured at the hands of

her father, not only through the pleasures of sexual intimacy but also through the comforts of romantic attachment. Her relationship with Shug is just one strand of the network of female kinship that gives Celie the confidence to leave Mister and open her own business. In *The Color Purple*, then, both the figure of the lesbian (in the form of Shug), and lesbian existence (in the form of Celie's relationship with her sister and the other women in her life), are the simultaneous facilitators of her life's transformation.[52]

3.8 Lesbian Existence in *Bastard out of Carolina*

When located within an archive of similar literary works, Allison's now canonical 1992 novel *Bastard out of Carolina* demonstrates what I claim is a common feature of the "lesbian *Bildungsroman*" and the coming out narrative: it does not only represent sexualized violence itself, but also a particular trajectory through which this materializes. Like the novels referenced earlier in this chapter, *Bastard out of Carolina* emerged out of the context of the Women's Liberation Movement and exhibited some of the connections being made between feminism, trauma, and the intersectional forces of race, class, and sexual orientation. Building upon the frameworks of trauma theory and therapeutic culture I discussed in Chapter Two, here I position the novel as exemplifying a specific narration of violence and recovery that is facilitated by the figure of the lesbian or lesbian existence.

Bastard out of Carolina is a semi-autobiographical novel set in the 1950s in Allison's hometown of Greenville, South Carolina. The novel's protagonist, Ruth Anne "Bone" Boatwright, is the illegitimate daughter of fifteen-year-old Anney Boatwright. Because of a car accident on the way to the hospital, Anney enters into a coma after Bone's birth. She is

[52] This framework of lesbian existence also facilitates the transformation of protagonists in multiple novels that foreground other forms of violence, from Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) to Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistlestop Cafe* (1987).

thus unable to provide the lie about her marital status necessary to avoid the registration of Bone as a "bastard". This is a marginalizing designation that Anney becomes obsessed with having purged from the birth record. Anney eventually marries the insecure and sadistic Glen Waddell, who sexually and physically abuses Bone throughout the novel, culminating in a brutal rape which is witnessed by her mother. In the end, however, it is not the rape itself, but Anney's decision to leave with Glen and abandon Bone, which serves as the novel's definitive trauma. This focus on the relationship between mothers and daughters emerges in later chapters through my analysis of the work of Ann-Marie MacDonald.

Despite the centrality of Bone's abuse at the hands of Glen, as well as the significance of the Boatwright men in the lives of Bone, her mother, and her aunts, *Bastard out of Carolina* is, at its core, a novel about a community of women, one which I argue might be viewed through the lens of the lesbian continuum. The novel's ultimate concern is not the sexual violence experienced by Bone, but rather, as Allison says (acknowledging her book's autobiographical element), "the complicated, painful story of how my Mama had, and had not, saved me as a girl" (1994: 34). I would extend this to claim that it is a novel not only about the ways in which Bone's (or Allison's) mother protected or failed to protect her, but more generally about how her survival was facilitated by the women in her family. In an interview with Allison, Carolyn E. Megan says: "The women in *Bastard* don't seem to recognize that it is their love for the other women that carries them through" (1993: 9). In response, Allison agrees, claiming that it is this fact that makes the novel "essentially a tragedy" (ibid.). Anney, she says, fears losing the family that she understands as being built around Glen. This fear makes her blind to and even complicit both in the harm he causes Bone and the way that he alienates Anney herself from her daughters and extended family. According to Allison, Anney's fear should instead revolve around the fact that "she loses her family when she loses her daughter. She doesn't know enough to be really afraid of that"

(10). Feminist analyses of sexualized violence have demonstrated that rape and abuse are not about sex, but rather about power. Following this, in "Ellipsis, Ritual, and 'Real Time': Rethinking the Rape Complex in Southern Novels" (2000), Laura S. Patterson claims that Glen's rape of Bone "represents rage against a matriarchal community" (41). Margaret Sönser Breen agrees, writing that "Glen's rape of Bone […] discloses incest abuse's function. It is the violent means of imposing a rigid gender order, one in which the bond between mother and daughter must not possibly serve to signify their love for each other but rather necessarily reflect Glen's authority" (2009: 100). Although Anney consistently prioritizes her relationship with Glen above all others, he is threatened by the strength that she draws from her mother, sisters and daughters, and the bonds that they share. It is when he attempts to reinforce his authority and masculinity that Glen becomes the most dangerous, and specifically so for Bone, who is the exclusive target of his abuse.

While the Boatwright women sustain one another in many vital ways, they are ultimately powerless in the face of their relationships with the men to whom they are bound. They consistently accept and reinforce the primacy of these conventional and gendered forms of intimacy. Peggy Dunn Bailey (2010) describes this alongside the intersectional forces of gender and class at play in the novel. Dunn Bailey writes that "[e]ven [Bone's] bold, sharp-tongued mother and elder sisters are women who, embodying stereotypical traits of 'white trash' womanhood, married and clung to men who embodied stereotypes of 'white trash' manhood" (281). The only exception is Raylene, who represents both lesbian existence as well as the figure of the lesbian. She embodies an identity and a way of life that enable Bone to conceive of a future for herself outside of the violent circumstances that have defined her existence so far.

Most critical reading of *Bastard out of Carolina* has pointed to the ambiguity of lesbian identity in the novel. Ann Cvetkovich, for example, writes that "[a]lthough Allison

explores the productive relation between incest and sexual pleasure […] the place of lesbianism in *Bastard out of Carolina* is left tantalizingly vague" (2003: 104). This is true in the case of Bone, whose incipient lesbianism is alluded to in *Bastard* but only made explicit in Allison's follow-up memoir *Two or Three Things I Know for Sure* (1995). This calling into question of the legibility of *Bastard*'s lesbian content is frequently also extended to the character of Raylene, "whose lesbianism is revealed only in the final pages of the novel, providing a partial explanation for her 'queer' tendencies toward isolation and loneliness" (Cvetkovich 2003: 105). I see Raylene's characterization as functioning both figuratively and literally as the explicit representative of the lesbian identity and community towards which Bone is moving.

Raylene, while being one of the Boatwright sisters, lives very differently from the rest of the women in her family. She resides alone at the edge of town, where she earns her living by collecting, repairing, and selling discarded items. Raylene neither lives with a female partner nor in a lesbian community. However, unlike the other women in Bone's life, she is not bound to oppressive heterosexual family units. Her way of living signals to Bone that she can function outside of those institutions. As Cvetkovich points out, it is not clear until the end of the novel that Raylene is a lesbian. However, even before this reveal, her way of life is already represented as distinctly queer; her mode of existence is both queer as in *strange*, and queer as in *outside of heteronormative structures*. The explicit disclosure of her lesbianism – via disclosure of a more easily legible lesbian relationship – occurs after Bone's rape and hospitalization, when Raylene says:

> One time you talked to me about how I live, with no husband or children or even a good friend. Well, I had me a friend when I was with the carnival, somebody I loved better than myself, a lover I would have spent my life with and should have. But I was crazy with love, too crazy to judge what I was doing […]. Bone, no woman can

> stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband. I made the woman I loved choose. She stayed with her baby, and I came back here alone. It should never have come to that. It never should. It just about killed her. It just about killed me. (Allison 1992: 300)

When her lesbianism is disclosed during this conversation with Bone, it elucidates not only her character's chosen circumstances but also her function within the text.

In addition, it is significant that Raylene is the character who puts an end to Glen's chronic abuse of Bone. Raylene is ultimately unable to stop the rape that occurs at the end of the novel. However, it is her discovery of Bone's bruised and bloody legs and buttocks that leads to Bone's decision to stay with Raylene when Anney eventually leaves with Glen after Bone's rape. Raylene reveals Bone's injuries to her brothers, and we then watch the scene from Bone's perspective, as her uncles react to her injuries. "'Is it true?' Beau demanded. 'That son of a bitch beat her bloody?' 'Like a dog,' Raylene told him. 'Child's striped all the way to the knees.' She pulled my panties free of my shoes and threw them at him. 'I'd kill him.' She said it in a very matter-of-fact tone that made me believe her" (245). Raylene incites her brothers to beat Glen, the result of which is Anney's short-term abandonment of him. The uncles are not always presented as good or reliable men. However, their enactment of violent masculinity coincides in this moment with a moving commitment to family, as we see them prioritise their desire to protect their sister and niece. Yet the incitement to violence comes originally not from them but from Raylene. Thus, through Bone's focalisation, the novel does not attribute Bone's rescue to her uncles but rather to her aunt, whose unconventional way of living extends, here, to a willingness to be associated with violence. The way in which Bone hears or remembers Raylene's commandment defines her perception of what her aunt embodies: disruption of the presumed patriarchal balance of protection, revenge and victimhood.

Anney temporarily – and unwillingly – separates from Glen following her family's discovery of his abuse. This emotional and physical withdrawal vicariously produces the hollowness of Anney's consolation of Bone: "Mama's hand moved automatically, stroking my head as if I were a wounded dog. I knew from the way she was touching me that if I had not come to her, pushed myself on her, she would never have taken me into her arms. I shuddered under that unfeeling palm, slapped her hand away, and ran for the bedroom" (252). Bone's apparently stubborn inability to be consoled by her mother – "I wanted her arms around me but I stood there rigidly, mouth shut tight, eyes dry" (251) – follows her intuitive sense that her mother does not possess the capacity to sincerely console her.

Bone copes with abuse by her stepfather in two ways: through lesbian existence, the concept of which is defined for her by her Aunt Raylene, and auto-erotically, through her masturbatory fantasies. These fantasies take on two functions: to counteract the power attributed to Glen through his violence, and to wish into existence a tactile connection with her mother. Alienated by her attempt to induce an affectionate response in her mother, Bone finds consolation in a *fantasy* of Anney's tactility:

> After a while I cried myself back to sleep. I dreamed I was a baby again, five or younger, leaning against Mama's hip, her hands on my shoulders. She was talking, her voice above me like a whisper between stars. Everything was dim and safe. Everything was warm and quiet. She held me and I felt loved. She held me and I knew who I was. When I put my hand down between my legs, it was not a sin. It was like her murmur, like music, like a prayer in the dark. It was meant to be, and it was a good thing. I woke up with my face wet from tears I did not know I had cried, my hands still holding on between my legs. (253)

This masturbation scene follows a series of others that all fall in the aftermaths of episodes of Glen's abuse. Throughout the novel, then, Bone's ability to fantasize about abuse

becomes a masturbatory defence against Glen's control over the scenarios of her sexual development:

> Yet it was only in my fantasies with people watching me that I was able to defy Daddy Glen. Only there that I had any pride. I loved those fantasies, even though I was sure they were a terrible thing. They had to be; they were self-centred and they made me have shuddering orgasms. In them, I was very special. I was triumphant, important. I was not ashamed. (113)

Thus, here, Bone's coping mechanism in the aftermath of her mother's rejection – the site of emotional trauma that defines the novel – is not just to fantasise her consolation but to make this fantasy a sexual one. As Cvetkovich (2003: 103) writes: "To call these fantasies masochistic in a simply derogatory sense, or to consider them the 'perverse' product of sexual violence, is to underestimate their capacity to provide not only pleasure but power […] Bone is able to seek and find solace in the masturbatory repetition of the violence she has experienced." Bone mobilizes the fear and shame that she experiences, transforming them into the anger and pleasure that constitute her queer childhood sexuality and ultimately become the means by which she is able to continue to live, and, eventually, even to thrive.

3.9 Conclusion

I began this chapter with a claim about the specificity of lesbian feminism's "utopian destination" (Jagose 1994: 2). While, as Jagose claims, this might be considered the goal of any political movement, throughout this chapter I have tried to show how, beginning in the 1970s, lesbian feminism underwent a series of particularized theorizations that positioned lesbian existence, and the lesbian herself, as naturally being in close proximity to the utopian ideals of feminism. These theorizations range from psychoanalytic accounts of lesbianism's

impossible relationship to the cultural sphere, to more materialist positionings of lesbianism as free of the oppressive power dynamics of heterosexual relationships. As I have shown, there are many things to criticize in all of these models, not least of which are, first, the potential essentialism of the definition of "woman" in such paradigms; and, second, the presumption of the lesbian's inherent politicisation and the heterosexual woman's necessary oppression. These critiques have "stuck" to lesbian feminism, to use Sara Ahmed's term (2010), contributing to characterizations of lesbian feminism as the prehistory of queer theory's contemporary ascendancy. Such characterizations mirror claims of the incompatibility of lesbian feminism with intersectional analyses, for which queer theory compensates through a postmodern anti-identitarianism. However, the decontextualizing and ahistorical perspective of such critiques threatens not only to erase the myriad contributions of lesbian feminists but, more specifically, the very existence of lesbian feminists of colour.

Utopian projects are by definition not realistic, and are certainly vulnerable to critique. However, they provide us with ways of imagining invigorating politics for which contemporary moments do not allow. Literature provides a space for the imaginative and speculative enactment of otherwise utopian theory and politics. Literary accounts of lesbian existence provide a way of imagining new forms of intimacy that, in turn, create new spaces of possibility. While Bone's Aunt Raylene in *Bastard Out of Carolina* may not, for instance, be immediately or easily legible as lesbian, her mode of lesbian *existence* – which might, in another frame, be called queer – is what makes possible the novel's utopic intervention. Here we see, in narrative form, the imagining of what different modes and levels of intimacy – between sister and sister, between aunt and niece, or between lovers – might achieve. Such intimacies, and the spaces of transformation that they produce, are at the centre of Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees*.

4 The Queer Temporality of Wartime in *Fall on Your Knees*

4.1 Introduction

Over the past several decades, a considerable body of work has been produced by scholars working to recuperate lost or omitted gay and lesbian histories.[53] World Wars I and II have been particularly fertile sites for this inquiry in terms of the impact of wartime on the sex/gender system, and women's wider participation in the public sphere (Doan 2006: 28). In *Disturbing Practices: History, Sexuality, and Women's Experience of Modern War*, Laura Doan describes women's lives in Britain during World War I, writing that:

> New forms of meaningful employment tested women's physical, mental, and moral strength, expanded the configurations and expressions of gender, and allowed greater independence and mobility, even adventurous travel. Above all, for the historian with interests in sexuality, war work threw these women together with others of their sex. (2013: 1)[54]

In this chapter, I build upon this body of work, turning to contemporary literary works related to such projects of recovery. Through a reading of Ann-Marie MacDonald's 1996 novel *Fall on Your Knees*, I explore how contemporary lesbian-feminist narrative fiction exploits moments of uncertainty – ruptures in the teleological flow of history – to conceive of alternate possibilities. They invite us to imagine utopias in these liminal spaces, even if such utopias remain necessarily temporary and provisional. I analyze how MacDonald uses narrative structure, temporality, affect, and language to produce what Kaye Mitchell calls, in her work on the historical novelist Sarah Waters, the "atemporal *ennui* of wartime" (2013:

[53] See Chapters Two and Three for more in-depth discussion on lesbian and queer historical projects of reclamation.
[54] This history also has a specific Canadian context; I will explore this further in my reading of *The Way the Crow Flies* (Macdonald 2003) in Chapter Five.

84, emphasis in original). Such atemporality becomes a site of lesbian-feminist possibility, which is, ultimately, violently disrupted. Ann Cvetkovich writes that she is drawn, through "a queer, even perverse, sensibility", to "idiosyncratic or shameful family stories and their incommensurate relation to global politics and historical trauma" (2008: 111). It is this relationship between intimate and public trauma that I am attentive to in this chapter, reading *Fall on Your Knees* within the context of queer feminist perspectives that challenge the separation of individual, historical, and collective experiences of trauma.

4.2 Narrative Structure

"Memory is a word for story, and nothing is less reliable" (55). So says Frances Piper, one of the four Piper sisters at the centre of *Fall on Your Knees*. This undermining of reliability characterizes the backwards narration of the novel, which persistently evades the reader's desire for a coherent account of plot. Instead of a linear narrative arc, we are offered silent pictures, fragments of songs, faded snapshots and a disturbing combination of childhood fantasy and violent realism – the slippery temporalities of repressed trauma. Cathy Caruth articulates memory as "a filtering of the original event through the fiction of traumatic repression" (1996: 15) and the repressed racial and sexual trauma of the Piper family persistently obfuscates our access to the family's story.

The narration begins at the end of the story with a series of descriptive photographs of the Piper family and their home in a small mining town in early-twentieth-century Cape Breton Island, Canada, and the first line of the prologue announces: "They're all dead now" (1). The narrator uses the plural first person to address the reader directly – sometimes questioningly, sometimes reassuringly – inciting and anticipating our unease. MacDonald uses this device to create an intimate space between the reader and the text, insinuating the

reader's presence and even, at times, creating complicity in the trauma that occurs. MacDonald's writing has been characterized as both cinematic and Gothic,[55] and the novel's opening scene inaugurates both aspects of the text:

> They're all dead now.
>
> Here's a picture of the town where they lived. New Waterford. It's a night bright with the moon. Imagine you are looking down from the height of a church steeple, onto the vivid gradations of light and shadow that make the picture…Look down over the street where they lived. Water Street. An avenue of packed dust and scattered stones that leads out past the edge of town to where the wide, keeling graveyard overlooks the ocean. That sighing sound is just the sea. (1)

This declaration locates the reader in a temporality in which the novel's characters are all already dead, even belabouring a point that could be considered self-evident in a historical novel. MacDonald refuses any expectation we might have of a happy ending or clean resolution. We are simultaneously written into the scene and situated as spectators, watching from a distance. The first line combined with the Gothic imagery suggests that this novel is haunted by the past. According to Kathleen Brogan, "to be haunted […] is to know, viscerally, how specific cultural memories that have seemed to have disappeared in fact refuse to be buried" (1998: 17). The backwards narrative of *Fall on Your Knees* is not only haunted by its characters' refused futurity but, as I will argue later in the chapter, by a particular cultural moment of possibility facilitated by the temporality of wartime.

The novel's prologue inaugurates a questioning of the reliability of the narrator, whose credulous account of past events suggests a child's perspective. Despite the innocent descriptions of each snapshot's contents, the reader begins to become acutely aware that

[55] See, for example, Candida Rifkind (2002); Joel Baetz (2004); Pilar Somacarrera (2004); and Gabriella Parro (2005).

there is something very wrong in the Piper family. The first snapshot of a family member is of Materia Piper:

> In the back is the kitchen where Mumma died.
>
> Here's a picture of her the day she died. She had a stroke while cleaning the oven. Which is how the doctor put it. Of course you can't see her face for the oven, but you can see where she had her stockings rolled down for housework…her house-dress actually is black since she was in mourning for Kathleen at the time […] Mercedes found her like that, half in and half out of the oven like the witch in Hansel and Gretel…When Mumma, died, all the eggs in the pantry went bad – they must have because you could smell that sulphur smell all the way down Water Street. (2)

Despite being told that Materia died of a stroke, it is apparent from the reference to her head in the oven and the "sulphur smell" that she committed suicide. However, more significant in this passage is the information that MacDonald provides about how the novel is meant to be read. The narrator's apparent acceptance that her mother had a stroke signals that we will have to read between the lines, that the information provided by will not be the whole story. In exposing the unreliability of her narrator in the novel's prologue, MacDonald provokes a practice of double reading in the reader. This strategy of sensitizing the reader to certain associations and affects is used throughout the novel and will be explored later in this chapter in relation to the absence of men during wartime.

This passage also reveals that the novel's third-person narrator is the youngest Piper sister, Lily, who is describing events that occurred the day she was born Her account of them is thus informed by the stories she has been told by her sisters, Frances and Mercedes, and by her father, James. More importantly, traces of the repressed trauma incurred on the day of her birth linger in her descriptions; she simultaneously narrates the story and, by implicating the reader in her narration, questions her own knowledge. Describing the

prologue's penultimate image, which is, in contrast to the snapshots, a "moving picture" of Frances on the night of her oldest sister Kathleen's death and her own birth, Lily asks: "What's she doing in the middle of the creek, in the middle of the night? And what's she hugging to her chest with her chicken-skinny arms […] What are you doing, Frances?" (3). Again, in this inaugural passage, the use of direct questioning insinuates the reader into the scene, inviting us to strain *with* the narrator to ascertain what is going on. Moreover, the novel's prologue, entitled "Silent Pictures," signals through a series of obscured and troubling images, that repressed intergenerational trauma characterizes not only the lives of the Piper sisters but also of the narrative structure and voice of *Fall on Your Knees*.

MacDonald returns to the moving picture of Frances by the creek throughout the novel, each time revealing a new piece of information. This narrative form mirrors Frances and Mercedes' own process of recovering their repressed memories of the night that Kathleen died while giving birth to Lily. Childhood sexual abuse is a prominent theme in MacDonald's first two novels, *Fall on Your Knees* and *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) and her subtle rendering of the complex processes though which children cope with repressed trauma is a hallmark of her writing. In the chapter following Kathleen's death, MacDonald documents that night's events from both Frances and Mercedes' perspectives, describing what we come to understand as key hours in the development of both of the girls' psyches. We see Kathleen through Frances' eyes, her body ravaged by the emergency caesarean section her mother performed. MacDonald describes Frances standing at the foot of Kathleen's bed, witnessing the horrific scene of her dead sister's body, bleeding and butchered: "Frances is young enough still to be under the influence of the cave mind. It will never forget. But it steals the picture from her voluntary mind – grand theft art – and stows it, canvas side to the cave wall" (146). Frances takes the twin babies from her sister's bed and carries them down to the creek to be baptised. There is a gap in the narration and it is

not clear exactly what happens to Frances after James finds her at creek; instead, the scene jumps ahead to the scene of Frances shivering in bed two days later:

> By now she has already lost her conscious grip on the events of two nights ago, when the babies were born. She has shivered them away. The cave mind has entered into a creative collaboration with the voluntary mind, and soon the two of them will cocoon memory in a spinning wealth of dreams and yarns and fingerpaintings. Fact and truth, fact and truth… (151)

Only much later in the novel does it emerge that, after Frances accidentally drowns one of the new-born twins in the creek, she is raped by her father James. This unspeakable act occurs in the "pale-green wingback chair" (347) and is witnessed by Mercedes, who immediately represses the memory. The chair becomes a leitmotif associated with James' character, its significance never entirely clear until the incident surfaces close to the end of the novel. When Mercedes later calls up the memory of a "painting from the junk pile […] called *Daddy and Frances in the Rocking-Chair*", she disturbingly realizes that "there was never a rocking-chair in this room or any other. Just the pale green wingback" (347). The way that Frances and Mercedes unconsciously process the violence and incest perpetuated by James is at once a representation of dissociation – a coping mechanism for dealing with trauma – and of the narrative structure of *Fall on Your Knees* itself, which mirrors this slow unravelling of memory, fantasy, and truth. Trauma is never registered in the moment, but only belatedly. For scholars of trauma such as Caruth (1991), this characteristic of trauma is particularly well-suited to literary representations that can accommodate dispersal and fragmentation. Passages such as those quoted above demonstrate two of the points that I examined in more detail in Chapter Three: the way that the literature of trauma has taken on a specific form; and also the way that theories of trauma have permeated the public consciousness. Here and across her oeuvre, MacDonald demonstrates a familiarity with

discourses around trauma. This emerges through different narrative devices in later novels, which I will discuss in more depth in the following chapters.

4.3 Times of Peace

In *Fall on Your Knees,* MacDonald paradoxically produces an affective space of peace and possibility within the historical rupture of wartime. I claim that the end of the war signals the loss of this space and that the violent reestablishment of the pre-war gender order is represented by James' violent recovery of Kathleen from New York on the day of the Armistice. Theories of queer temporalities provide a productive lens through which to examine this refusal of the straightforwardly oppositional positioning of war and peace. As I described in Chapter Two, in *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004), Lee Edelman describes how the seemingly neutral stance of being "on the side of the children" (3) is in fact oppressively political in the "unquestioned and unquestionable" (3) value it places on the figure of the Child. Edelman criticises the fetishization of the Child as the promise of reproductive futurism, and claims that "queerness names the side of those not 'fighting for the children'" (ibid.). One might read peace as functioning similarly to Edelman's figure of the Child: it is a concept almost universally deemed positive and desirable. Additionally, the work of queer thinkers such as Heather Love (2007) and Jack Halberstam (2005) opens up new ways of reinvigorating those spaces and times typically characterized as negative or backwards, through an examination of the alternative modes of connection and being that they enable. I argue that MacDonald does similar work in *Fall on Your Knees*, through the forms of intimacies that she imagines as being made possible by the queer temporality of wartime. For MacDonald, the positive implications of peace are not incontestable, specifically in regard to the complex repercussions that it had for women at

the end of World War I.[56] Read through the lens of those theories of queer temporalities which refuse the normative pull of progress, I read MacDonald's disruption of times of war and times of peace in the novel as a form of queering. Progress, and its refusal, is also a defining orientation of the novels discussed in later chapters, where it structures relations to the nation (*The Way the Crow Flies* [2003]) and the home (*Adult Onset* [2014]). Here, I argue that MacDonald articulates the symbolic function of the Armistice in *Fall on Your Knees* through her almost excessive syntactical linking of the end of the war and James' arrival in New York.

A quarter of the way into *Fall on Your Knees*, James Piper receives a letter from New York City, where he has sent his eighteen-year-old daughter Kathleen to study opera. Kathleen is both beautiful and exceptionally talented and has been the singular object of her father's obsessive attention. She has inherited the gift of music from her mother Materia, a Lebanese-Canadian whom James married when she was only thirteen. The passage describing the arrival of the letter and the events that unfold after it are worth exploring at length for two reasons; because they constitute what Cvetkovich (2008:112) calls the "'unrepresentable' trauma" to which literary texts, like living memories, can "insistently return"; and because it is in these pages that MacDonald suggests a link between individual and historical trauma. While the bringing together of these different levels of trauma was at the heart of my discussion of trauma in Chapter Two; here, these links are manifested specifically through the forceful reclamation of public and private spaces for men at the end of both World War I and World War II.

Kathleen's very proper letters home, which describe the various cultural experiences she partakes of and the excellent tutelage of her opera instructor, are eagerly anticipated by

[56] For more about the reconsolidation of women's inequality after the war, see Doan, *Disturbing Practices* (2013).

her father and little sisters in Cape Breton:

> On November 7, James walks to the post office with his girls to find a letter from New York waiting for him. There is his usual pleasure at the sight of the postmark, but it is followed today by slight surprise, for there is no return address and his own name and address are written in a ladylike but unknown hand…. Its contents are a cruel contrast to its refined penmanship. It is signed 'An Anonymous Well-Wisher'. James folds the letter over and over until it is minute, and considers: either it is a malicious joke. Or it is true. He leaves that night.
>
> Three and a half days later, at 6:05 a.m. on November 11, 1918 he walks out of Grand Central Station.
>
> He finds Kathleen. And takes her home again. (131)

This gap – the blank physical space on the page before the last indented line – insinuates violence and produces an uneasy affect in the reader. MacDonald uses aesthetic gaps in the text strategically throughout the novel to generate this tension and coinciding affect. In Chapter Two, I discussed the ways in which affect can be differentiated from emotion or feeling. The latter two terms describe conscious recognition and labelling, while affect erupts prior to such processes. In terms of literary form, then, feeling and emotion might be more easily translated into representation or description. Affect is, on the other hand, not only represented in, but is in fact produced *by*, literary form. The recurring blank space on MacDonald's page produces precisely an *affect* of uneasiness, rather than the *feeling* of it. This device holds a double function: it is just one example of how form, and not description, produces affect; more specifically, however, in its emptiness it refuses the language that is so often asked to document the feeling that affect precedes.

Kathleen's experience in New York is revealed in fragments throughout the novel,

via diary entries and narration interspersed among the stories of her sisters Mercedes and Frances, daughter/sister Lily, and mother and father. At the end of his life, James gives Kathleen's complete diary to Frances, who then passes it on to Lily. The diary remains hidden from the reader until it is narrated through Lily's reading of it as the novel's penultimate chapter, "Hejira". Unlike her letters home, the diary chronicles Kathleen's coming of age in early-twentieth-century New York and describes her falling in love with the city and her discovery of "jazz, chop suey, Harlem, and finally Rose, a brittle, gender-ambiguous, and stunning mixed-race but black-identified pianist" (216). However, when James receives the letter from "An Anonymous Well-Wisher", all we know is that Kathleen has begun her training in New York and has fallen in love with a New Yorker. Immediately after James takes her home, we read of Kathleen's death giving birth to twins in the attic of her family home, which is narrated from the perspective of her mother and younger sisters.

The next time Kathleen's story surfaces, it contrasts dramatically with this violent scene. Emerging fifty pages later, two pages are set apart from the text of the novel with an elaborate border of roses, hearts, musical notes and thorns, and bookmarked by the lyrics of a romantic folk song: "*I will take you home again, Kathleen…across the ocean wide and wild…"* (176). These two pages describe Kathleen "[m]aking love with the New Yorker […] an experience which announces to Kathleen that the present tense has finally begun" (176). Such passages appear several times in the novel, each time demarcating a small fragment of Kathleen's diary. They are unique not only because of their physical separation from the rest of the text, but also because of how the narrative voice shifts and language and form change. Prose shifts into poetry and song lyrics, whispers, and fragments of sentences convey Kathleen and her lover's experience, their individual voices undistinguishable from one another. When they are introduced as interruptions of the prose in the early stages of the novel, we might be led to presume that Kathleen's lover is a man and that she is pregnant

with his child. Without allowing us to know what will happen next, MacDonald uses an abrupt change of language and form – and the affective rupture of the unexpected line space on the page – to indicate violence, as James' retrieval of Kathleen is inserted into the conversation between her and her lover:

> I want you
>
> want you to
>
> want you too
>
> want to
>
> oh you
>
> so, so
>
> sweet
>
> Oh
>
> Oh
>
> like honey
>
> I love you
>
> taste like honey
>
> my love
>
> That fall James got a letter. He went down there and brought Kathleen home the day the war ended. (17)

MacDonald does not explicitly reveal what happens upon James' arrival in New York until the end of the novel. However, the repetition of slightly divergent variations of this sentence throughout the novel suggests that something unspeakable has occurred, and indeed the ominous letter turns out to be the catalyst for the repressed events out of which the story emerges.

The full account of what happened to Kathleen is finally revealed in the late chapter

"Armistice Day," which is located shortly after "Hejira" and constitutes the novel's shattering climax. MacDonald's insistent and repeated linking of the end of the war and Kathleen's violent removal from New York by her father begins to function like an irritant, sensitizing the reader to the connection between the two and undermining the typically positive connotations of the declaration of peace:

> James got a letter from "An Anonymous Well-Wisher". He left that night. Three and a half days later, at 6:05 a.m. on November 11, 1918, he walked out of Grand Central Station. He walked all the way to where she was staying in Greenwich Village because he couldn't get a cab. There were crowds. (550)

As MacDonald has now articulated three times, James arrives in New York at 6:05 a.m. on November 11, 1918. Armistice Day. He is not able to get a taxi because the streets are crowded with people celebrating the end of the war, an event of which he in unaware. Arriving at the apartment of his distant relative Giles, with whom Kathleen boards, he finds his daughter in bed with her lover who is not the black man he expected to find, but a black woman, her piano accompanist Rose. James beats Rose and locks her out of the room and then rapes and impregnates Kathleen.

When Giles arrives home, MacDonald again juxtaposes her revelation of the unspeakable event upon which the novel's plot has hinged with a reminder of the happy occasion of the Armistice. Giles, surprised to find James in her home, senses that something has happened to Kathleen and Rose. The scene is intensely disturbing as James brushes off Giles' repeated attempts to check on Kathleen and offers her tea. She tells him that she would have been home earlier, but was caught up in the celebration: "James gives her a sociably blank look, pours tea, his hand shaking only slightly. Giles breaks into a big papery smile. 'Oh James, the war is over. This morning at eleven o'clock. Oh wait till I tell Kathleen it's over. It's all over'" (551). James' rape of Kathleen, which ultimately results in her death

giving birth to twins, has happened almost simultaneously with the declaration of peace. For the reader – who, through this diegesis, is finally aware of Kathleen's tragic fate – Giles' pronouncement, "Oh wait 'til I tell Kathleen it's over. It's all over," takes on a double meaning. In another bordered diary fragment we read:

> The night before the war ends, Kathleen unties an emerald sash from around the waist of her scandalous new dress of pale green silk chiffon, and winds it round and round the brim of her lover's charcoal fedora…They have to be careful, but it's hard. They are so young, they forget that the world is not as in love with them as they are" (308)

Passages such as these not only juxtapose the violence of James's incestuous rape with the tenderness of intimate scenes between Kathleen and Rose, but also, through the subtle warning that they issue, have the unexpected effect of creating a sense of dread around the end of the war. My understanding of peacetime, rather than wartime, as a space of rupture is echoed later in this dissertation by other instances in which uneasy or negative affects are unsettlingly juxtaposed with nationally or globally understood episodes of celebration: armistice, mid-century progress or contemporary gay rights.

In her article "Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*", Cvetkovich compares Alison Bechdel's graphic novel *Fun Home* (2006) with other prominent graphic memoirs such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986, 1991) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003). She describes how, through the lens of queer sexuality, *Fun Home* extends *Maus* and *Persepolis*' tying of individual and historical experience via the figure of the second-generation witness to trauma. Using Cvetkovich's argument to think about *Fall on Your Knees,* I propose that, together, Kathleen and Lily – both mother and daughter and sisters – "[serve] as [this] intergenerational witness who explores the ongoing impact of traumatic histories on successive generations and into the presence" (Cvetkovich 2008: 112). Lily,

who is described as looking uncannily like her mother except for a crippled leg, sets out for New York City on foot and her journey is narrated alongside her reading of Kathleen's diary. When she arrives in New York City, Lily finds Rose, who has been living as a man, and has become a well-known jazz musician, "Doc Rose" since Kathleen's disappearance. During the War Rose lived a double life, dressing in what Kathleen describes as embarrassingly feminine clothes, playing classical music by day, and dressing in her father's suit and going to Harlem to hear blues music with Kathleen in the evenings. We learn that after being beaten and thrown out by James, Rose was unable to find out what happened to Kathleen. Shortly thereafter she cut off her hair, put on her father's suit and fedora, and left her mother's house for good. Dina Georgis has pointed out that the term *Hejira*, Arabic for migration, has an additional layer of meaning in its resemblance to the Hindi word for intersexed/transgendered identity, *Hijira* (2005: 216). I read Rose's transformation as indicative of the diminishing post-wartime tolerance for the blurring of gender boundaries.

Lily's arrival gives Rose a sense of closure as she finally learns what happened to Kathleen and is able to mourn her loss. When she answers the door to see Kathleen's daughter, she breaks down weeping:

> Rose soaks Lily's neck and shoulder and groans into her ear as though something jagged and wrong were being drawn out of her body. She moans, 'Oh no, no, no,' because for Rose it has just happened….
>
> 'I love you,' says Rose,
>
> 'I know.'
>
> 'Never leave you.'
>
> 'It's ok.'
>
> 'Kathleen.'
>
> The word becomes a keening and Rose crumples in agony at the extraction of that

last mortal shard. It's the one that hurts the worst, she tried to leave it where it was so it could kill her slow and numb, the last lethal fragment. Her name. Lily guides Rose to the floor retching, past crying, until finally she begins to rock on her heels. 'It's okay. It's alright now, Rose.'

And Rose takes her first unfettered breath. (542)

Rose is only able to mourn the loss of Kathleen when she meets Lily, who moves in and takes care of her. Years later, an elaborate family tree is drawn up by Mercedes, that reveals all of the Piper family's illicit connections, including Kathleen's affair with Rose. This belated acknowledgement of past intimacies, within and beyond the bloodlines of family, comes to symbolise the potential for spaces of rupture to also be productive. It also gestures to a queer sense of temporality in which intimacies are drawn across time and space. The devastating sexual and racial trauma that Rose and the Piper sisters have experienced, trauma which is paradoxically connected with the return of peace, cannot be undone. However, the connection between Lily and Rose, and between Rose and the other branches of this queer family tree might be read as MacDonald's tenuous offering for a future outside of these configurations of trauma.

4.4 Mourning, Melancholy, and the Modern Girl

In this section, I argue that in *Fall on Your Knees* MacDonald exposes the post-World War I failure of modernity to incorporate the multidimensional challenges to dominant ideologies that were being experimented with during the war. Kathleen "crosses cultural, racial, sexual and geographical boundaries to enter the modern" and this "transgression is punished by the paternal violence that leads to her death" (Rifkind 2002: 35). Again, taking up Cvetkovich's project of exposing links between individual and historical trauma, I connect this to the way

that a pre-War gender order was forcibly re-established via post-World War I modernity.

James' ambitions for Kathleen are all-consuming. She is raised to remain aloof from her peers, including her young sisters, and to have contempt for authority and aversion towards her mother. Although she is half Lebanese, Kathleen is educated by her father to perform whiteness and to distance herself from her mother's cultural and racial background. Her father is her only friend and "[s]he has been trained to live for that glorious place, the Future" (95). Kathleen is being groomed for her flight from Cape Breton Island and for her imminent career as an opera diva; it comes as no surprise, then, when MacDonald writes that "Kathleen is truly and utterly and completely Kathleen in New York City" (123). MacDonald describes Kathleen as being bred to thrive within the context of early-twentieth-century New York:

> […] a classically trained girl with modern ideas about holding the mirror up to nature. The born performer's zeal to leave no heart intact. An engine in her stoked so high it turned her hair red in the womb. Her mixed Celtic-Arab blood and her origins on a scraggly island off the east coast of a country popularly supposed to consist of a polar ice-cap are enough, by American standards, both to cloak her in sufficient diva mystery and to temper the exotic with a dash of windswept North American charm. She'll refer to pickled moose meat and kippered cod tongues and occasionally swear in Arabic just to get the legend rolling, but she is of the New World, the golden West. (123)

Although Kathleen moves to New York City to study classical music, Candida Rifkind claims that she becomes a "modern woman through multiple embraces: she embraces a modern city and celebrates its new, multiracial forms of music and dance just as she embraces Rose, an act through which both women transgress boundaries of sexual, racial, and gendered norms" (2002: 34). Gillian Siddall claims that Sweet Jessie Hogan, the

"Goddess of Blues", whom Kathleen and Rose see perform at Mecca, a Harlem jazz club, before their first intimate encounter, is modelled on Bessie Smith, an enormously successful pioneer of the genre known as the "Empress of Blues" (2005: 10). Siddall points out that after the war, as jazz and blues music became more established, they also became more male-dominated. She provides a historical context for the blues scene in Harlem in the early-twentieth century, recording the erasure of Smith and other women who, while being the first to record blues music, are rarely acknowledged in historical accounts of jazz and blues. According to Eric Porter, women's blues of the 1920s critiqued "patriarchal gender relations, male violence, and the restrictions of the domestic sphere" (2002: 26). The women of blues "told of leaving violent, unfaithful, or inadequate male lovers; boasted of their own sexual prowess and conquests; and affirmed lesbian relationships as healthy alternatives to the confines of heterosexuality" (ibid.). In her reading of MacDonald's use of periodization in *Fall on Your Knees*, Siddall points out that the invocation of this social context via Bessie Smith provides a significant backdrop for the unfolding romance between Rose and Kathleen, both of whom are young mixed-race musicians negotiating their place in the liminal space between the old and new world. MacDonald's summoning of Bessie Smith takes on an additional meaning in the context of my analysis of the displacement of women from the public sphere following World War I: the increasing male-domination of the genre coincides with Rose's permanent assumption of a male identity as she leaves home to take up a career in jazz and blues music.

In *Fall on Your Knees*, Frances and Mercedes each have a unique relationship with modernity, which I argue is shaped by their conscious and unconscious identification with their older sister Kathleen, who for them was the embodiment of the modern girl. Until their father goes to fight in the war, Mercedes and Frances have very little to do with Kathleen. It is only when James is away at war that they are granted access to their sister, who in her

loneliness begins to cherish her time with the little girls. In a chapter entitled "Three Sisters", MacDonald writes: "Frances has discovered a new game: exploring the mysteries of the teenager Kathleen" (99). Every evening when Kathleen has finished her homework, the girls are allowed to enter her room, and do so in awe: "Kathleen's room is a temple of sophistication. Its shelves are lined with every girls' book you could ever think of, from *Little Women* to *Anne of Green Gables*. Its walls are plastered with pictures of great artists and beautiful underthings cut from magazines" (100). As they mature, Frances and Mercedes each incorporate aspects of these cultural artefacts into their identities, Frances through her fascination with European silent film and Mercedes through her attachment to the classic novels that they read as children. Their modes of incorporation are ultimately oppositional, however. Kathleen's death, alongside the other traumatic events that take place that night – the drowning of one of the twin babies, and Frances' rape by James – represents the central psychic rupture of Frances and Mercedes' lives as well as the primary narrative rupture in the text. Mercedes and Frances process their loss through what Sigmund Freud calls melancholy, through which, in Trish Salah's words, "one identifies with the image of the lost beloved, that is, one incorporates one's image of the other as an ideal image for the self, as a defense against the loss of the other" (2005: 244). Judith Butler describes "melancholic incorporation", in which "the ego demands that the lost object not be grieved for and alters the status of the object from that of something external to itself to that of something internal; the ego now identifies with some part of what has been lost" (1997: 134). I argue that in this case what (or who) has been lost is Kathleen, whom Frances and Mercedes equate with artefacts of the modern and premodern girl.

Frances and Mercedes each internalize this lost object – Kathleen – in distinctive ways: Mercedes through her retreat into premodern ideals of domesticity and puritanism, and Frances through her attachment to European silent film and her burlesque performance

at a speakeasy. Through these performances, Frances simultaneously fulfils and parodies her audience's expectations of gender, race, childhood, and sexual desire:

> She'll start out as Valentino in a striped robe and turban. While one hand teases the piano keys, she removes the robe to reveal Mata Hari in a haze of purple and red. The seven veils come off one by one to 'Scotland the Brave' and, just in case anyone's in danger of getting more horny than amused, there's always a surprise to wilt the wicked and stimulate the unsuspecting. For example, she may strip down to a diaper, then stick her thumb in her mouth. 'Yes my heart belongs to Daddy, so I simply couldn't be ba-ad'. (293)

Frances' performance reflects Freud's description of the uncanny, in that it is both familiar and yet is unrecognizable. "[F]or this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (1955 [1919]: 241). I read Frances' performance as invoking the collective repressed memories of the Piper sisters: of Kathleen's experience at the New York nightclub, Frances' molestation, the Scottish and Arabic influences of their parents, and the aesthetic of the silent films that transport European modernity to Cape Breton Island. Rifkind points out that Frances' burlesque act and the sex acts that she performs behind the speakeasy "may also be unconscious compulsions to repeat and thereby exorcise the trauma of James' abuse" (42). Here we can see echoes of Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina* (1992), introduced in Chapter Three, in which the protagonist's sexual relationship to her body is constituted through a series of auto-erotic acts that allow her to work through her trauma.

Mercedes internalizes Kathleen's death and Frances' abuse in a different way. In a striking description of her response to the original incidence of trauma, MacDonald writes:

> Mercedes' almost-seven-year-old nerves are still tender but tonight begins a process

> that will eventually turn them into steel. Her little nerve fibres are being heated up. Tonight is the smelter. When her nerves have been heated up enough, when they are white-hot, they'll be plunged into cold water, tempered and strong for ever. (155)

In *Fall on Your Knees*, all narrative roads lead back to this night. Mercedes has witnessed what she internalizes as Kathleen's punishment, and her response is to withdraw "into the stereotypically feminine state of religious and filial duty that modernity attempts to disrupt" (Rifkind 2002: 34). While Frances attempts to enact modernity at home and in the speakeasy, Mercedes refuses to enter what she cannot help but see as the transgressive space responsible not only for the death of her sister and mother but also for Frances' abuse, for which she continues to carry guilt.

4.5 Times of War

In the previous sections, I examined the strategies that MacDonald uses in order to represent the correlations between the Armistice and the violent re-establishment of the pre-war gender order. Scholars of gay and lesbian history have investigated this topic primarily by concentrating on the greater freedom and access to employment that women enjoyed during times of war (cite one or two such theorists, just a gesture). Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, another novel that falls into the category of lesbian historical fiction and has a focus on women and wartime, reflects this focus on the material conditions of war as a mode of exploring queer feminist possibility. MacDonald's mode of engaging with the past is different from Waters', in that she articulates the radical potential of the liminal space of wartime mainly via the affect generated by the physical absence of men from domestic and public space, and the connections that this facilitates among women. As I will discuss, MacDonald fuses elements of genre, language and form to evoke in the reader an unexpected

affective response around the temporality of wartime. This is related to the profusion of trauma in *Fall on Your Knees,* which shapes how the reader affectively approaches and experiences the text. In this section, I explore how, in *Fall on Your Knees*, wartime is produced as an affective time of queer feminist pleasure and possibility.

In Chapter Two, I accounted for some of the theories and responses to trauma, focusing on feminist approaches and influences. I cited Cvetkovich who, in the introduction to *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003), describes how she came to take up trauma as her object of study. She says: "Trauma discourse has allowed me to ask about the connections between girls like me feeling bad, and world historical events" (3). In this chapter I am not interested in exploring the explicit connections between emotion and politics, but rather those paradoxical moments when "historical or global events classified under the rubric of trauma" (ibid.) do not necessarily produce the appropriate coinciding affect. While war itself is, undeniably, both a material condition and a lived experience, it is also a symbolic or cultural text and "a repository of feelings and emotion" (ibid.). While the destructive qualities of war cannot and should not be ignored, in the context of this chapter I will think about how, in terms of lesbian existence, the temporality of wartime is not necessarily only negative.

In *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald uses the extended metaphor of "No Man's Land" to convey multiple layers of meaning. While other scholars have discussed the role of No Man's Land in MacDonald's novels though metaphorical notions such as the cultural uncanny (Baetz 2004: 77), I take up a more literal reading of No Man's Land as representing not only a "stretch of contested land that has yet to be won by either side" (*Fall on Your Knees* 108) on the battlefields of World War I, but as the psychic space created by the physical absence of men during the war. While the No Man's Land of the frontline is described in terms of its dehumanizing horror, the No Man's Land of the home front is

almost uncannily peaceful. MacDonald illustrates this by juxtaposing two dramatically contrasting short chapters: “Dulce et Decorum” and “The Bobbseys at Home.”

No Man’s Land is first introduced in the chapter “Dulce et Decorum”, which describes James Piper’s experience on the frontlines of France. The chapter’s title recalls the poem “Dulce et Decorum est” (1920) by British World War I poet Wilfred Owen. Owen’s poem references the line “Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori” – It is sweet and honourable to die for your country – from Horace’s Odes, and describes the violence of a chlorine gas attack in the trenches. Following an exposition on the gruesome and disfiguring effects of the gas on a soldier who failed to put his mask on in sufficient time, the poem ends with the lines:

> My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
> To children ardent for some desperate glory,
> The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
> Pro patria mori. (1994 [1920]: 30)

Like Owen, MacDonald uses the chapter “Dulce et Decorum” to describe, almost to cinematic effect, the trench warfare of World War I as experienced by James. MacDonald’s description reads, in its explicit detail and unmitigating imagery, like the instructive screenplay of a horror film: one can picture the “bright bits of men that sail through the air and festoon the remaining trees here in the land of permanent November” (107). James spends uninterrupted weeks in trenches that have become vermin-riddled mass graves. Outside of these trenches lies a place described as even more terrifying in its bleakness:

> The mud between the opposing trenches is called No Man’s Land. This is a reasonable name for a stretch of contested ground that has yet to be won by either side […]. A limbo – grey, yellow, green, mostly grey, and empty except for the dead. [...] no man may venture into this space between the lines and remain a man […]. It

> is possible to become a man once more if you make it back behind your line again, but you suspend your humanity for your sojourn in between. (108)

MacDonald juxtaposes the violence of "Dulce et Decorum" with the tranquility of its successor, "The Bobbseys at Home", which describes the Piper sisters in a scene of domestic contentment in their home in New Waterford. It is evening and Kathleen writes to James while Frances and Mercedes play make-believe on her bed. There is a short moment of discord in which Kathleen reveals to her sisters that the romanticized stories their mother Materia has told them about their grandparents are false, but the girls are quickly appeased by Kathleen's agreement to let them sleep in her room. The three sisters "snuggle down" and Kathleen begins to read them a story from the popular early-twentieth-century children's series *The Bobbsey Twins* (Hope 1904-). At the chapter's end, this rare scene of peace in the Piper household is interrupted and our perspective moves down the stairs towards Materia, who "wrings her hands before a big bout of cleaning and baking. She received a telegram today. James is coming home" (112). In *Fall on Your Knees*, a telegram notifying a wife of her husband's safe return from war is not an occasion for celebration. The ominous message rather jolts the reader out of the warm domestic interlude and back to the reality of its impermanence and the danger associated with James' imminent return.

4.6 Genre, Affect, and Praying for War

James' absence from the Piper household is accompanied by a subtle change in the novel's tone. There is an easing of pressure, and the sense of danger that has been cultivated since the narrative's first pages is alleviated, if only temporarily. In order to demonstrate how, in *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald produces wartime as a paradoxically peaceful interlude, it is necessary to examine how she invokes the bad affect that is attached to the Piper family

and particularly to James. One of the ways that this functions is through genre, in this case MacDonald's merging of the literary conventions of the gothic and the fairy tale.

In the previous section, I explored some of the ways in which the novel's prologue, "Silent Pictures", inaugurates *Fall on Your Knees*' subscription to the gothic genre. Gabriella Parro describes *Fall on Your Knees* as a neo-gothic, and, more specifically, *female* Gothic text. She claims that while gothic horror is always, in a sense, domestic horror, "female Gothic is concerned with household dramas and threats to women" (177). Parro proposes that there can be no doubt that *Fall on Your Knees* falls into this genre, summing up the novel's gothic characteristics:

> There is a family curse, a haunted house, a young woman in peril of sexual violation, a concern for family bloodlines, spiritually hollow Catholicism, a woman confined to an attic, several dead mothers, family secrets including incest, and orphans who learn the truth of their parentage. (177)

Immediately following "Silent Pictures" is Book One, Chapter One, entitled: "To Seek His Fortune." In contrast to the gothic atmosphere invoked by the series of photographs depicted in the prologue, the first chapter shifts into the form of a fairy tale. It is in a sense the origin story of James Piper and the Piper family, and begins:

> A long time ago, before you were born, there lived a family called Piper on Cape Breton Island. The daddy, James Piper, managed to stay out of the coal mines most of his life, for it had been his mother's great fear that he would grow up and enter the pit. She had taught him to read the classics, to play piano and to expect something finer in spite of everything. And that was what James wanted for his own children. (7)

In *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1983), Jack Zipes writes that fairy tales almost always involve a quest (x).

This characteristic appears in the early pages of *Fall on Your Knees* through MacDonald's narration of James' story. She describes how, following abandonment by his abusive father, and the death of his mother, James left home for good: "James took a tartan blanket [his mother had] woven, and the good books she had taught him to read, and tucked them into the saddle bag of the old pit pony [...]. He got on the blind pony and rode out of Egypt" (8). James travels all the way to Sydney, sleeping out of doors and planning his future. When he finally arrives, he heads straight for the affluent part of town, and finds work tuning pianos. In "To Seek His Fortune", a chapter that breaks from the gothic characteristics of the prologue, there are numerous conventions of the fairy tale. It is a traveller's tale and an origin story; it includes both a battle between good and evil and a monster. However, MacDonald upsets these conventions, as James himself is the novel's monster and the battle between good and evil is his internal battle to resist his sexual desire for his daughter. Throughout the novel, MacDonald produces a great deal of uneasiness around the character of James. Although in terms of diegesis, the extent to which that apprehension will manifest is not revealed until fairly late in the narrative, it is foreshadowed at various points in the text. Again, using a trope from fairy tales, MacDonald issues three distinct warnings about James through the voices of three separate women: Mrs. Mahmoud; Mrs. Luvovitz; and finally, Rose's mother Jeanne. Each woman's premonition is characterized by a supernatural tone reminiscent of the fairy tale witch or godmother.

When James becomes the piano tuner in the Mahmoud house, he establishes a relationship with Mrs. Mahmoud. They bond over their shared knowledge of the Gaelic language – James' mother tongue. One day Mrs. Mahmoud reads his tea-leaves, making a prediction that will echo with the reader as the story of the Piper family unfolds. She says: "I see a big house. A family. There is a lot of love here. I hear music… A beautiful girl. I hear laughter…Water" (11). Materia and James elope and Materia is consequently disowned

from her family. MacDonald describes Mrs. Mahmoud's grief as not only connected to the loss of her child, but also with her sense of foreboding about James: "It's a terrible thing for a mother to know that her daughter will not have the happiness she herself has had. But more than that – more than sorrow – was a chill. For she had seen something in his cup" (17). At this early moment in the narrative, the reader does not know that James will eventually destroy the women in his family. However, Mrs. Mahmoud's premonition contributes to the tension accumulating around the Piper family.

The second such warning comes from Mrs. Luvovitz, the matriarch of the Jewish family living next door to the Pipers. After learning that her very young and very pregnant neighbour has been disowned by her family, Mrs. Luvovitz takes Materia under her wing. Mrs. Luvovitz teaches thirteen-year-old Materia to cook and acts as midwife at the birth of her daughters. Like Mrs. Mahmoud, Mrs. Luvovitz expresses anxiety about James, not based on fact, but rather on a feeling: "There's something not right, I can't prove it, I can feel it" (105). The third and final warning about James comes from a less benevolent source, Rose's, mother Jeanne. Her uncanny premonition directly names James' desire for Kathleen: "'I'll bet your Daddy's just crazy about you." (527). Jeanne senses James' abnormal fixation on his daughter and Kathleen is not wrong to fear her. In the end, it is revealed that she is the *Anonymous Well-Wisher* who informs James of Kathleen's affair and provokes his journey to New York, which is, for Kathleen, a fatal turn of events.

MacDonald combines elements of several genres including the fairy tale and the gothic in order to produce an unsettling affect around James' character. The accumulation of this affect haunts the reader and it is primarily through its alleviation that wartime emerges as a moment of reprieve.

I have now examined some of the ways that a sense of menace is embedded in the text of *Fall on Your Knees*. I have demonstrated the ways in which MacDonald manipulates

the affect that this produces in the reader, sensitizing us to the parallels that she cultivates between the end of the War and Kathleen's violent removal from New York and subsequent death in the attic of the family home in New Waterford. I wish to take up this strand again, this time moving backwards in the narrative to the beginning of the war, which is understood by both James and Materia to be an opportunity to keep Kathleen safe.

Kathleen is an overindulged and precocious girl of twelve when James first recognizes that he is sexually attracted to her. This is revealed to both James and the reader simultaneously, in a scene that echoes the one in which James met Materia at the same age. Kathleen comes upon her father tuning the family piano, and just as her mother did when eighteen-year-old James was performing the same service for her family, she strikes a chord. The hammer swipes James and before he realizes what is happening, he strikes Kathleen in the face twice. The act is followed by his immediate shock and remorse. James reaches out to console his daughter, and as he holds her he becomes aroused: "He holds her close, no harm, never any harm. Her hair smells like the raw edge of spring, her skin is the silk of a thousand spinning-wheels, her breath so soft and fragrant […] then he shocks himself" (61). James pushes Kathleen away abruptly – "Sick. I must be sick" – He runs to the garden, and vomits. Materia, who has been preparing dinner, watches silently from the door. In this moment, Materia's shame about her inability to love her daughter becomes secondary; as she watches over her sleeping child, she thinks: "Loving the girl now seems like an easy task compared with protecting her" (61). Even when James and Materia once again engage in conjugal relations, which distract James from his desire for their daughter, Materia keeps a vigilant eye on her husband and daughter: "If James has forgotten the demon, Materia hasn't. She saw it. It looked at her. She knows it's coming back" (670). With this unsettling description, the reader, through Materia, is provoked into a vicarious state of vigilance.

Just as the Armistice coincides with Kathleen's symbolic and then literal death, the

day that Canada joins the War coincides with her symbolic birth – her first public performance for a paying audience. It is her first triumph and her euphoria is echoed by that of the crowd in the concert hall. They cheer first for Kathleen and then for the announcement that interrupts their applause: "Ladies and Gentlemen. We are at War" (77). Later that night, Kathleen is awake revelling in her success: "Twelve hours into The War, Kathleen sits at her vanity, brushing her hair […] She is not sleepy, how could she be? Tonight she sang. The world will never be the same" (77). As Kathleen looks into the mirror she is described as seeing herself for the first time. She is intoxicated by her own beauty and stares at her reflection, exposing and admiring her breasts and arranging and re-arranging her hair, until she remembers her mother's warning that if one gazes too long in the mirror, the devil will appear. Suddenly Kathleen sees "Pete", the ghoul from her childhood nightmares, behind her in the mirror. She flees her room screaming and throws herself onto James' bed, begging to stay with him for the night. Parro interprets the demon Pete, who reappears throughout the novel to each of the sisters in different forms, as the spectre of James' incestuous desire (2005: 186). As he comforts his frightened daughter, James once again becomes sexually aroused. He jumps from his bed and takes her to the kitchen for a cup of warm milk, finally tucking her into bed with her sisters. He stays until she falls asleep and then goes back to his room and locks the door. MacDonald writes: "The next day, James outsmarts the demon for the second time. He enlists" (78). When James tells Materia his decision she makes the sign of the cross and immediately goes to church. James, disdainful of his wife's fervent Catholicism, assumes that she has gone to pray for him to change his mind. Materia arrives at the church and goes directly to the grotto of Mary, where "she prostrates herself as best she can […] and gives thanks to Our Lady for sending The War" (78). The reader, who has become highly sensitized to the affect of menace that MacDonald produces within the text, again empathizes with Materia's sense of relief.

4.7 The Feminine Temporalities of Language

In *Fall on Your Knees*, MacDonald is preoccupied with representing that which it is beyond the ability of language to represent. She uses language to designate spaces that are distinctly feminine, and that are both produced by and coincide with the temporality of wartime. Feminine space is configured through two languages in the novel. Firstly, the special language invented by the Piper sisters is heavily influenced by the Arabic and Gaelic of their mother and their father as well as the diverse influences that they take from nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century novels, music and popular culture. Secondly, the intimate language of Rose and Kathleen shares these influences but adds to them the cadences of Harlem jazz, classical opera and the lovers' erotic interludes. Later, when Materia and Kathleen are dead, language stands in for this loss but also for the continued survival and connectedness of Mercedes, Frances and Lily. As I explored in Chapter Three, the spaces of lesbian existence depend not only on the sexual relations manifested in this novel in the relationship between Kathleen and Rose, but on other communities of care and intimacy. If theorists discussed in Chapter Three, such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, foregrounded language as a potential site of feminine connection, the shared intimacies of language among the sisters in *Fall on Your Knees*, express this language's mode of embodiment.

Although Canadian Maritime communities are often represented as exemplifying an idyllic or infantilized kind of rural Britishness, they were and are profoundly diasporic populations.[57] Corey Frost describes New Waterford, the setting of *Fall on Your Knees*, as:

> A coal-mining boom-town […] populated not only by the predominant Irish and

[57] For more on diaspora and Canadian maritime history as it relates to literature, see Corey Frost (2005); R.M. Vaughan (1994); and Ian McKay (1994).

> Scottish cultural groups but also by blacks, including the West Indian labourers who came to work in the mines, as well as German Jewish immigrants and Lebanese merchants, who started off in the area as travelling salesmen, speaking English or Gaelic with the customers as needed. (197)

The Piper family is representative of this cultural and linguistic diversity. James Piper is a white Protestant whose first language is Gaelic, and Materia Piper is a Lebanese Catholic, whose first language is Arabic, and whose English slowly deteriorates as she is increasingly isolated and silenced by James. Materia's youth and cultural otherness, which attracted James to her at first, begin to repulse him soon after their marriage, and he quickly turns to racialized discourses to mediate his own discomfort with the realization that he married and impregnated a child. He wonders: "How had he been ensnared by a child? […]. He knew from his readings that clinical simpletons necessarily had an overdeveloped animal nature […]. It was queer. Sick even. Perhaps a racial flaw. He would read up on it" (34). Materia, who is only thirteen years old and banished from her parental home, becomes deeply depressed during her pregnancy and subsequently feels anxiety about her lack of love for her daughter, Kathleen. The first time she experiences something like affection for her child is when she speaks to her in Arabic: "Feeding the child some lovely mush at the kitchen table, Materia leaned forward and cooed, '*Ya Helwi. Ya albi, ya Amar. Te'berini*.' The child smiled and Materia said a silent prayer of thanks, because at that moment she'd felt a faint breath of something not far from love" (35). James overhears and intercedes:

> "Don't do that, Materia."
>
> "What?'
>
> "I don't want her growing up confused. Speak English."
>
> "Okay." (35)

Kathleen internalizes her father's aversion to Materia and senses that any closeness with her

mother would be considered by James to be a betrayal. This is made explicit in a scene in which Materia rocks Kathleen and sings to her in Arabic. Kathleen is described as recoiling from her mother, exposing both her internalized abjection for her mother and her fear of her proprietorial father's reaction:

> Kathleen stayed perfectly still, pressed close up against the rolling mass. Materia stroked the fire-gold hair and passed a warm brown hand across the staring green eyes. Kathleen tried not to breathe. Tried not to understand the song. She tried to think of Daddy and light things – fresh air, and green grass – she worried that Daddy would know. And be hurt. There was a smell. (39)

James prevents Materia and Kathleen from establishing a relationship. His abhorrence of Materia's racial otherness is also transferred to Kathleen, as exhibited by her reference to her mother's "smell". However, through her description of Kathleen as "trying" not to understand the song, MacDonald indicates that this detaching from her mother does not come naturally to Kathleen. The alienation, produced by her fear of upsetting her father, takes work.

With James gone to war, Materia finally experiences relief from the constant tension surrounding his presence. In the chapter "Over Here", MacDonald begins: "With James gone, Materia comes to life. She takes pleasure in the little ones" (87). In addition to posing a threat to Kathleen, James has thus far denied Materia meaningful access to her two younger children. In this moment of reprieve from James' tyranny, MacDonald reintroduces the topic of language, writing that the three sisters believe that their mother does not speak much English. MacDonald attributes Materia's loss of English to her chronic isolation: "[…] Materia doesn't speak English much. For with whom would she converse in English? Not her husband […] Prepositions were the first to fall away, then adverbs crumbled along with whole clauses, until Materia was left with only the more stolid verbs and nouns" (87).

However, it is not just her English that Materia has lost through disuse, but also her Arabic. She is described as conversing with her daughters in the "Arabic of children – of food, endearments and storytelling. *Ya aa'yni, te'berini*" (87). Via language, MacDonald carves out a space in the novel that is intimately feminine, a space created for Materia and her two youngest daughters, Mercedes and Frances.

The pages directly following James' departure describe a feminine space characterized by a fusion of Arabic language, music, dance, food, and the comfort of Materia's maternal body. Indeed, Materia's newfound ease with her daughters is partly the result of her freedom to speak to them in Arabic and to tell them of their Lebanese heritage. MacDonald writes that "Mercedes and Frances understand that Arabic is something just between them and Mumma" and goes on to describe how Materia tells her daughters stories about the Old Country, which Mercedes and Frances know to be "[a] place where everyone speaks the Piper girls' private at-home language right out in the open, and everyone looks like their mother" (87). Once a week Materia takes out an Arabic record and plays it for the girls. MacDonald describes the crackling silence at the beginning of the record as a passage to another world:

> First the antechamber of snowy static, airlock to another world, then…open sesame: The *deerbeki* beats rhythm, ankle bells and finger cymbals prance in, the *oud* alights and tiptoes, a woodwind uncoils, legless ancestor of the highland bagpipe, rising reedy to undulate over thick strings thrumming now in unison. It all weaves and pulses into a spongy mesh for the female voice to penetrate – pends itself below, trembling up at the voice, licorice, liquid, luring, 'dance with me before I make love to you later, later, soon'. (89)

Materia teaches Frances and Mercedes to dance the *dabke*, as her mother taught her, and in the absence of James, the domestic space of the Piper home is described in distinctly

corporeal terms. In contrast to James, who is described in terms of his angular, disciplined body and perfectly pressed shirts, Materia's body is something different, into which one can "sink". It "provides a pillow for each head, her plushy smell of fresh wet bread and oil, a pot of *bezella* and roz with lamb on the stove" (87). For Frances and Mercedes, Arabic language, music, and dance become intrinsically fused with the tactile recollections of Materia's body. As I will illustrate later, when Materia is gone these elements live on in the private language of the remaining Piper sisters.

Earlier in the chapter, I explored the relationship between Frances and Mercedes and their older sister – and their attachment to modernity *through* her – in terms of Butler's notion of melancholic incorporation. This notion can be extended to the way that Frances and Mercedes' secret language is influenced by their relationship with Kathleen. It is only when James leaves for war that Kathleen begins to spend time with the girls: "At first she does this for Daddy's sake, because she knows that otherwise they get nothing but their mother's barbaric yammer during the day while she's at school – she can smell it hanging in the air when she gets home" (99). Kathleen attempts to maintain a sense of order for her absent father, her words echoing the racist tones of his own. Although Kathleen maintains her distance from Materia, she now begins to share with her sisters her love of girls' books, great art, opera music and fashion magazines. When Kathleen is gone, these artefacts, as well as the half-remembered stories about her life and death, animate the speech and mythology of Frances, Mercedes, and Kathleen and James' daughter, Lily. This is exemplified in the following passage in which MacDonald describes a scene between Lily and Frances, whose burlesque performances have by now begun:

> On relatively sober evenings, Frances curls up next to Lily and whispers whiskey in her ear: 'Lily. We are the dead […]. We all died the same time as Kathleen and we've been haunting the house ever since' […]. Lily sticks her foot between Frances'

ankles.

'Frances. Al akbar inshallah?'

'In fallah inti itsy-bitsy spider.'

'Ya koosa gingerbread boy kibbeh?'

'Shallom bi'salami.'

Alladin bi'sesame.

Bezella ya aini Beirut.'

'Te berini.'

'Te berini.'

Tipperary.'

Every night, pissed or stone sober, Frances puts her money in the secret place for Lily. (295-296)

The girls' secret language is often spoken between them at night, particularly after traumatic events, and coincides with their physical closeness. It connects them to the past, through their mother's language and through lyrics and fragments from nursery rhymes, as well as to the present, in the way that they intersperse it with their own nonsensical syntax and slang. Shortly after the death of Materia and Kathleen, and Frances' sexual abuse by James, Mercedes comes to Frances in bed:

'Frances, can I sleep here tonight?'

'I don't care.'

'Thanks.' Mercedes snuggles in, tucking Frances's always icy feet between her own.

'*Aa'di aa'e'ley, Habibti.'*

'Don't worry, Mercedes.'

'*Te'berini.'*

'Yeah, yeah.'

‘Goodnight, Frances. I love you.’

‘Barf.’

Mercedes giggles and falls asleep. (190)

Again, MacDonald references the warming of Frances’ cold feet by those of her sister. The language that the Piper sisters develop when they are left alone with their mother and Kathleen during the war is what sustains them when she is gone and her worst fears of James have come to pass.

Kathleen’s narrative is distinct from that of her younger sisters, as is the way that language functions within it: “Making love with the New Yorker is an experience which announces to Kathleen that the present tense has finally begun. It’s summer now. For Kathleen, the Present is a new country, unassailable by the old countries […]” (126). In this section, I focus on the space around the relationship between Kathleen and Rose as a liminal site of possibility within the temporality of wartime. I will explore how MacDonald demarcates this space through the twin sites of music and language.

When eighteen-year-old Kathleen arrives in New York City, she immediately begins training with a famous opera coach, and soon after Rose Lacroix is introduced as her piano accompanist. Rose is also a musical virtuoso, a fact which Kathleen does not initially acknowledge because her perception of Rose is mediated by the racism that she has inherited from her father. Rose, in turn, is sceptical of Kathleen and surprised to find that she does, in fact, have talent:

> Rose is an extremely good pianist, but Kathleen doesn’t notice that at first, for two reasons. First, because when you’re training with a famous bastard in New York City, with one eye on the met and the other on obscurity, you don’t notice the quality of the piano accompaniment during your lesson unless it is incompetent. But this pianist is doubly inaudible because she is black and therefore outside any system that

nurtures and advances a classical virtuosa. So Kathleen thinks of Rose not as a pianist but as an accompanist.

When Rose looks at Kathleen the first time, she sees a daughter of fortune and looks back down at her piano keys. When she looks up the second time it is to verify that the sound that just filled the room really came from that milk-fed thing standing on the carpet. The voice is worth considering. The singer can go to hell. (125)

Rose and Kathleen's relationship quickly moves from dislike and antagonism, to mutual respect, to passionate love, their affair in many ways facilitated by the unique temporality of wartime from which it emerges.

The New York City of *Fall on Your Knees* feels evacuated of men. Kathleen lodges with her spinster Aunt Giles, with whom she participates in war-related volunteer projects with other aging women. Aside from the maestro and David, a young man with whom Kathleen has a brief affair, female characters dominate the landscape of New York City. Even Kathleen and David's affair is short-lived, as he is almost immediately conscripted into the war. With David gone, Kathleen returns her full attention first to her vocal training and then to pursuing Rose, her emerging desire for whom is enabled by David's departure. Kathleen and Rose's relationship seems not only to depend on, but to exploit, the very space of possibility thus created: Rose's cross-dressing is necessitated by the impossibility of visible lesbianism during this period; it is also, however, made *possible* by the absence of men.

Georgis explores Kathleen's attachment to Rose in psychoanalytic terms, referring back to her forbidden identification with her mother. When Kathleen first hears Rose's piano compositions she is spellbound. Her classically-trained ear allows her to hear the motifs of Debussy and Chopin. As Georgis points out, however, Kathleen's recognition of certain

strains in the music and not others is suggestive of her disavowal of her own personal history. Georgis writes that she is, for example, unable to identify "the multilevel rhythmic activity, typical of an African beat. Nor does she hear Rose's African-American influence, even though her Arab mother played ragtime at home on the piano and was an accompanist for black vaudeville artists. Furthermore, Materia's own improvisational compositions were comparable to Rose's in that they had a similar wild and unsettling incongruency" (2005: 18). Materia's music was forbidden and denigrated by James, yet Kathleen hears echoes of it in Rose's compositions. Through them, her mother's presence is evoked and, although Kathleen does not immediately recognize this association, it moves her. When Kathleen finally relinquishes her compulsion to classify Rose's music, she is able to fully give into it, saying: "I lost time. I wanted to live in that music, no, to wear it loose around me instead of skin […]" (484). Kathleen's submission to Rose's music eventually becomes desire for Rose herself. Despite Kathleen's earlier rejection of her mother, in New York she comes to fully realize her own desire through the uncanny familiarity of Rose's music. Although less so than for her sisters Frances and Mercedes, it is in some ways through the language, culture, and musicality of their mother that the spatial and temporal experience of wartime becomes one of pleasure and fulfilment for Kathleen.

Kathleen and Rose not only come to love one another *through* music, but the space for their love also seems to exist *within* that music. As Kathleen's diary appears in the novel long after the actual events of their love affair and Kathleen's subsequent death, the story of Kathleen and Rose is temporally displaced. Structural and syntactical elements within the novel differentiate the time and place of Kathleen and Rose from that of the rest of the characters. MacDonald's first description of an intimate encounter between Kathleen and Rose is less prose than poetry, and is set apart on two pages drawn with elaborate borders of roses and thorns. It is worthwhile to return to this first passage, and to quote it at length,

because it demonstrates the way that the shift in form and language is a manifestation of the distinct temporality created by desire. This temporality is, according to Kathleen, "the present tense […] a new country" (126). MacDonald continues:

> It's a first-love conversation. Mouths can't kiss each other enough or find enough of the beloved to be kissed enough. The invisible ocean holds the room and the bed and the lovers suspended and treats them like aquatic plants, arms can never stop moving, fronds in the liquid breeze, hands never stop waving slowly side to side, caressing the loved one, *hello* […] fingers never stop fanning, tendrils in a ceaseless bouquet, all parts sway and sway sometimes violently sometimes almost not at all. A small grazing gesture ignites the need for closer, and breaks the surface of the water, *never in you enough,* gulping air, *never contain you enough*, on dry land now, *never hold you enough,* the desert heat, *drink you, oasis lover shimmering under a palm, I will burn to ashes here then blow away* – until that merciful peak is discovered and once that is discovered, the slow tumble back down the hill, buckets of water spilling in slow motion, streaking the sand along their way until again the gentle sway, the ocean floor, the grazing touch that reignites the sea. (176)

This passage does the descriptive work of recounting Kathleen and Rose's unfolding romance, but also of establishing a temporality for them alone. It is a temporality of desire and possibility, which, while existing within the plot of the novel and within the context of wartime New York City, also feels simultaneously distinct and outside of these structures. A similar kind of worlding takes place in the passages describing the intimate domestic temporality created among the Piper sisters, through their private language and the mythologies they create around their family history.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the ways in which MacDonald uses literary form in order to produce affect. I have read MacDonald's envisioning of wartime as an affective temporality of queer-feminist possibility. Conventional understandings of wartime evoke a series of gendered expectations of immediacy and deferral. The action of combat and war is in direct opposition to the presumed stasis of the Homefront. For the woman who remains, it is understood that her contentment will be held in abeyance until the return of her (male) partner; for the man who leaves home to fight, it is expected that his return, when it does occur, will be marked by celebration. These two sides of the experience of wartime and the anticipation of its termination are thus structured around gendered relationships to temporality.

In *Fall on Your Knees*, these negotiations of immediacy and deferral are shifted; the absence of men brings not only familial fragmentation, but the potential for different versions of intimacy that are made impossible by the violence produced by proximity to masculinity. In the novel, Materia's paradoxical desire is to defer peace – to defer James's return in order to keep her daughters safe. Instead of grieving for reproductive futurity's impossibility, we see a *refusal* of futurity through the desire to prolong the fragmentation of the family. This is simultaneously, moreover, paired with a different version of futurity through language, music, and fantasy.

In complicating straightforward associations between war and peace, MacDonald echoes those feminist and queer projects that challenge the separation of intimate and public trauma. Through her positioning of the Armistice as a violent rupture, MacDonald frames the time and space of war as enabling alternative connections and intimacies among women, modes of being which might be understood through the lens of lesbian existence.

MacDonald's use of literary form and devices such as narrative structure, focalization, fragmentation, and language, produces affect, which circulates not only within the text, but beyond it, creating intimacies between characters, both living and dead, and between the text and the reader.

5 Affect, Family and the Nation in *The Way the Crow Flies*

5.1 Introduction

"The sun came out after the war and our world went Technicolor. Everyone had the same idea. Let's get married, let's have kids, let's be the ones who do it right" (3). The family at the centre of Ann-Marie MacDonald's *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003) exists in this post-war, Technicolor world, and the novel itself unfolds cinematically, beginning with a late-summer road trip through Eastern Canada. It is 1962 and the McCarthy family are travelling towards their new home after a five-year sojourn on a military base in Germany. "Outside the car windows the corn catches the sun, leafy stalks gleam in three greens. Arching oaks and elms line the curving highway" (6). Here, the landscape of Canada is simultaneously vast and intimate – containing the family of four within its warm expanse and opening before them, infinite in its horizons. It is a blank slate – innocent, immense, and far removed from the violence that stains the European continent. For the McCarthy family, it is home. It is appropriate that MacDonald should begin her narrative with such a journey: Two parents in the front seat, two children in the back, a vastness of highway in front of them, and the easy pleasures of stops for ice cream and the unassuming intimacy between husband and wife. Just as the novel's opening scene situates a happy family within a hospitable Canadian landscape, so in this chapter I read the McCarthy family as representative of the post-WWII re-consolidation of Canadian nationhood. Specifically, I explore three aspects of this trope: Firstly, in examining the private memory culture of the McCarthy family, I think about how the mythologies surrounding family and nation are not natural but rather both performative and discursively constructed. I argue that in her coupling of family and nation, MacDonald demonstrates that these two institutions never operate discretely. Instead, both the pleasures

and the violences embedded in familial and national structures bleed into one another, becoming mutually constitutive and, finally, indistinguishable. Secondly, I consider the novel's protagonist, Madeleine, examining the narrative function of both her childhood sexual abuse and her identity as a lesbian, and claiming that her wilfulness positions her as an "affect alien" or "feminist killjoy" (Ahmed 2010). Finally, I argue that, in contrast to *Fall on Your Knees,* in *The Way the Crow Flies* MacDonald demonstrates how the conditions for the production of violence embedded within the domestic realm are not exclusive to dysfunctional, abusive families. They can also be located within, and be produced by, the shelter and happiness of good families. Ultimately, *The Way the Crow Flies* is the story of such a family. Of kind, protective parents in love with one another and devoted to their offspring: Of clever, considerate children with bright futures ahead of them. It is all too easy to identify the spectre of violence in representations of family such as the one at the centre of *Fall on Your Knees*. However, it is both more challenging and more uncomfortable to recognize it here, in discord with the promise offered by the novel's idyllic opening scene. More disturbing yet is to see how this violence radiates out into the world, and how the preservation of the site of familial innocence and happiness has dire consequences – not only for each member of the family, but for their community and, ultimately, for the nation itself. Drawing the reader into this desire for the preservation of these affectively saturated sites of familial and national innocence, MacDonald produces a complex and ambivalent interplay of complicities, revealing how our investments in such intimate structures cannot be untangled from the structures of coercion and violence which maintain them.

In my reading of *Fall on Your Knees* in Chapter Four, I attempted to complicate straightforwardly oppositional positionings of war and peace. I read not only WWI, but the Armistice that ended it, as a violent rupture, particularly in terms of its ending of the queer-feminist temporality created within the context of wartime. In this chapter, I continue my

disruption of the notion of peace through a reading of MacDonald's second novel, *The Way the Crow Flies*, set in post-WWII Canada and narrated across two time frames, the 1960s and the 1980s. Madeleine McCarthy, a successful stand-up comedian and television personality, is haunted by events that took place during her childhood on a fictional Canadian Air Force Base, Centralia. Ricky Froehlich, the adopted Métis son of Madeleine's neighbours – Henry and Karen Froehlich, a Jewish Holocaust survivor and his Canadian wife – is erroneously charged with the sexual assault and murder of Madeleine's classmate.[58] The first half of the novel unleashes a series of complex and traumatic events which at first implicate only Madeleine and her father Jack but eventually involve the entire community. While Jack becomes embroiled in a convoluted espionage plot, inadvertently helping to smuggle a German war criminal into the country, Madeleine and several of her classmates are being molested at school by their teacher Mr. March. Although these two subplots commence independently of one another, they become entangled when two of Madeleine's classmates unintentionally murder another little girl while re-enacting the scenario of their sexual abuse. Because of Jack's sworn confidentiality, he fails to reveal his witnessing of an important detail that could have corroborated Ricky's alibi. Madeleine, ten years old at the time, becomes convinced that her testimony caused his false imprisonment. In making these two seemingly disparate events – the sexual abuse of a little girl and the Canadian government's complicity in sheltering criminals of war – the centre of her narrative, MacDonald provocatively positions state and intimate violence and their resonating effects in close proximity to one another.

Drawing upon the work of cultural memory and trauma studies, in her article "Ill-

[58] These plot details are based on true events. In 1959 in Clinton, Ontario, 14-year-old Steven Truscott was convicted for the rape and murder of his 12-year-old friend Lynne Harper. Truscott was originally sentenced to hang, making him the youngest death-row inmate in Canada, however his sentence was commuted to life in prison. Granted parole at age twenty-four after having served ten years in prison, in 1969 Truscott was paroled and lived for decades under an assumed name. In 2001, his case was reopened after an appeal from *Lawyers for the Association in Defence of the Wrongfully Convicted* and in 2007 he was finally exonerated of the crime.

Fated Lessons: History, Remembrance, Trauma and Memory in Ann-Marie MacDonald's *The Way the Crow Flies*" (2006), Susanne Luhmann reads the novel "as a critical engagement with Canadian narratives of national remembrance" (93). She claims that MacDonald's text "indexes the interconnections between a host of different national and transnational traumatic events. The Holocaust and its resonances in postwar Canada, the wrongful convictions of Stephen Truscott and others and the silence surrounding childhood sexual abuse prior to the 1970s […]" (ibid.). For Luhmann, the novel "highlights the limitations of remembrance practices that are *invested* too heavily in the mastery of trauma by way of historical knowledge" (ibid., emphasis in original). In her article, Luhmann considers the ways in which Jack and Mimi McCarthy differently engage with and resist coming to terms with the continued effect of historical traumas. Building upon her analysis, in this chapter I claim that the McCarthy family is representative of the post-war re-consolidation of Canadian nationhood. I read this as functioning through two specific narrative devices: The relationship between Jack and Mimi, and the sexual abuse of their daughter, Madeleine, by her teacher. I argue that this post-war generation carried the burden of reconsolidating national structures and values in the post-war and Cold War period. Traumatic knowledge is embodied by Jack and Mimi and internalized by their children, leading to disastrous effects not only for their family but for their community and nation.

5.2 "Conte-nous ça, Maman": The Story of Jack and Mimi

In *The Way the Crow Flies*, the romance of marriage, family, and nation are one, and MacDonald's description of Jack and Mimi McCarthy in the novel's opening pages inaugurates this theme. Not only are Jack and Mimi attractive and prosperous, but they are also sincerely happy. MacDonald describes the intimacy between them in terms both erotic

and domestic. Here, the familiarity of settled, married partnership is not what destroys the conditions for desire, but rather what produces them. Watching her husband in the car, Mimi thinks to herself: "*I have such a good man*" (32). For Mimi,

> [t]here is nothing more erotic than this knowledge, no Hollywood scene could rival this station wagon in the sunshine with this man and his children and the secret that only she knows: his face, hovering just above her own, deserted by his defences. At the mercy of his own strength, needing her to take it from him, keep it safe. Then to give it back to him. (ibid.)

Mimi's desire for Jack is bound to his identity as a good husband and father, and the romance between them cannot be untangled from their pride and investment in the life that they have created together. MacDonald's portrayal of married life in *The Way the Crow Flies* is as tender and nurturing as it is violent and destructive in *Fall on Your Knees*. However, it is precisely this which intensifies the effect of the novel's eventual violence, and MacDonald's opening scene – a family of four, safely contained by a car and by the peaceful, rural landscape of Canada – is difficult to reconcile with the events that unfold throughout the novel: Madeleine's sexual abuse and the murder of a little girl at the hands of her classmates, her brother Mike's estrangement from his family and subsequent death, and the false conviction and imprisonment of an innocent young man.

In a national literature often characterized by dangerous and alienating landscapes, *The Way the Crow Flies* instead depicts Canada's landscape as hospitable, welcoming the McCarthys back into its embrace.[59] In this chapter, I frame MacDonald's depiction of geography and people through my earlier conception of post-war Canada as a time and space

[59] Landscape and geography have always been a central preoccupation of Canadian national literature, both as literary motif and metaphor. Within a national literature often invested in differentiating Canadian writing and identity from their British and American counterparts, the motif of Canada's hostile environment, particularly the struggle to survive as both individual and nation within such an environment, has been central. See, for example, Northrop Frye (1972) and Margaret Atwood (1972). In more recent years this tenet of Canadian Literary Studies has been challenged, for example by Susan Glickman (2001) and W.H. New (1997).

of rupture. Following the "disturbing havoc created by the war on the gender system itself" (Doan 2006: 518), a part of the labour that was required to re-establish the gender order in post-war times involved prioritizing the right kinds of national subjects. MacDonald's account of the Canadian landscape and people's enthusiastic reception of the McCarthys upon their arrival from Germany is telling. As members of a white, heterosexual, patriotic, military family, Mimi, Jack and their children exemplify such ideal subjects. However, in juxtaposing their idealization with Madeleine's observations during the family drive through Ontario, MacDonald conjures the presence of those communities and individuals for whom the Canadian state has been less hospitable: "The Indians grew corn. This is the part of Ontario first taken from them by settlers. They fought here alongside the English, first against the French, then against the Americans in the War of 1812. Now there are reservations" (14).[60] Such invocations of Canada's origins in white settler colonialism overwrite the picturesque descriptions of its landscape. In turn, the McCarthy's desire to erase and rewrite the violent history of the Canadian nation mirrors larger projects of nation building. However, MacDonald's narration consistently undermines this wilful blindness. As Luhmann writes, "[b]y telling a national history that remembers national and personal traumas, the novel implicates the Canadian nation in American slavery, the German Holocaust and the genocide of Native people. [The novel] acknowledges childhood sexual abuse and revives the painful legacy of the wrongfully convicted" (105). In *The Way the Crow Flies*, MacDonald characterizes the landscape of Canada itself as a spatial and temporal repository of memory, one which always communicates its history, even when communication takes the form of denial.

Jennifer A. Stephen points out that following the unprecedented public engagement

[60] The first Reserves date back to the 1600s, and were a part of the French missionaries' project of encouraging traditionally nomadic Aboriginal Peoples to settle in one area in order to facilitate conversion to Christianity and the colonial acquisition of land. The Reserve system was codified into Canadian law in 1879 under *The Indian Act*, and remains highly controversial and problematic.

of Canadian women during WWII, Canadian policy makers turned their attention to "stabilising the household on the domestic front while ensuring a smooth transition to peacetime economy" (2007: 125). Averting post-war unemployment was central to this project and key to this was "encouraging women to withdraw from the formal waged economy" (ibid.). Women were encouraged to return to the domestic sphere through both formal and informal mechanisms,[61] and a part of this included rewarding those who properly embodied these post-war ideals. In *The Way the Crow Flies*, this is exemplified by Jack and Mimi, who not only embody the values of ideal Canadian subjectivity, but more importantly, in doing so, they are made to be happy. MacDonald describes the McCarthy family's first outing and interaction with the local community after they move into their new home in Centralia:

> It's simple, really: if you like people they will probably like you back. It helps that Jack and Mimi's children are polite and answer in full sentences. It helps that their daughter is pretty and their son is handsome […]. It helps that Jack and his wife are attractive. Not just because Mimi is slim and stylish with her pumps and pencil skirt. Not because he is blue-eyed and relaxed – effortless gentleman, a natural polish that goes well with his mill-town respect for work and working people. They are attractive because they are in love.
>
> It has worked. The dream. Post-war boom, the kids, the car, all the stuff that is supposed to make people happy […]. They hold hands under the counter and chat with the locals […]. Dessert is on the house. Welcome back to Canada. (66-67)

What MacDonald initially frames as "simple" good-will is in fact dependent on a number of factors, which she goes on to establish in the sentences that follow. As the novel progresses,

[61] For a more in-depth discussion of gender in the post-war period in the Canadian context, see, for example, Ruth Roach Pierson (1986): *"They're Still Women After All": The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* and Mona Gleason (1999*)*: *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling and the Family in Post-war Canada*.

it becomes clear that such acceptance, and indeed happiness, is not simple for those who do not embody the kind of ideal Canadian subjecthood that the McCarthys do.[62]

In *The Way the Crow Flies*, Jack and Mimi are characterized by their embodiment of post-war gender roles: Jack is a handsome army officer, Mimi a beautiful homemaker. In the novel's opening scene, its protagonist, Madeleine, witnesses the glamour of her parents from the backseat of the car: "[Mimi] looks like a movie star. Madeleine watches her adjust the rearview mirror and freshen her lipstick. Black hair, red lips, white sunglasses […]. Her father waits with his hands in the pockets of his chinos, removes his sunglasses and squints up at the blue sky" (5). While Jack and Mimi perfectly embody the gender roles of the 1950s and 1960s, MacDonald's text draws attention to their innate contradictions. Ideal femininity, as enacted by Mimi, is characterized by a performance of dependence and delicacy.[63] This performance is, moreover, premised on a commitment to concealing both Mimi's own strength and the inherent vulnerability of her husband's masculinity:[64] Unlike James Piper, the father in *Fall on Your Knees*, Jack McCarthy is kind and fair and adored by his family. Yet, even as his paternal authority is unquestioned, MacDonald's narration exposes the tenuousness of his masculinity. Consistent descriptions of him in terms of vulnerability

[62] Despite what might read in certain passages as a romanticized portrayal of the ideal post-war Canadian family, through references to other members of the community who struggle with issues such as domestic abuse, alcoholism, and depression, MacDonald indicates the difficulty that some families experience in striving to keep up this appearance. *The Way the Crow Flies* is set in 1962, just one year before the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which I described in more detail in my Introduction. Friedan's critique emerges in the novel through various figures on the periphery of the McCarthy family's social circle.

[63] MacDonald's depiction of Jack and Mimi recalls Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. Claiming that, rather than expressing an innate gender identity, gender is an illusion created by a "stylized repetition of acts" (140), Butler writes that such acts "are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and discursive means that the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (1990: 136). In the differentiation of performance and performativity, Butler defines performance as a 'bounded act,' whereas performativity "consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, contain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer's 'will' or 'choice'" (1993: 24).

[64] The cinematic quality of the prose and the slightly exaggerated perfection of their embodiment of masculinity and femininity might be read in the same register as the gender performances of butch-femme. Thinking about it this way also resonates in terms of descriptions of their sexual life and butch-femme's reframing of feminine sexual receptivity and vulnerability as a form of strength. For more, see my account of butch-femme culture in my discussion of lesbian-feminist literary traditions in Chapter Three.

extend not only to his physique: "Something innocent about his blue eyes – it could be his lashes, golden brown and too long for a man" (31). They also characterize scenes of sexual intimacy: "[a]nd when she lies beneath him […] Jack is glad to know she is stronger than he is, she must be to take him like that, to stay soft and welcoming the way she does, only her fingertips hard in his back […]. To stay soft the harder he gets" (70). The strength of Mimi's femininity is described not only in terms of her ability to accommodate Jack's masculinity, but as something private that belongs to him: "Her mouth, her tongue, her half-closed eyes in the moonlight, face turned to one side, for no one else but him. 'Take what you want, baby, take it. *C'est pour toi.*'" (ibid.). This quotation, when read alongside the passage cited above from the novel's opening scene, marks an economy of desire between husband and wife, at the core of which stand such transactions of female strength and male vulnerability. Yet what reads as tender and reciprocal between Jack and Mimi – the vulnerability that is allowed to emerge through this sensual and consensual exchange, and the allure of their flawless performances of masculinity and femininity – transforms into something disturbing when it is absorbed by their children, surfacing later in the text through Madeleine's desire to protect Jack from knowledge of her sexual abuse, her parents' homophobia, and Mike's impulsive enlistment in the American military, which he hopes will please his father but instead leads to his estrangement and death.

If the McCarthy family is the product of Jack and Mimi's genuine love for one another, it is simultaneously willed into existence, discursively and performatively, through their private memory culture. The mythology of the family, like that of the nation, takes work to construct, particularly during times of upheaval and rupture such as the period in which the novel takes place. Wendy Brown describes the 1960s as "an era of profound political disorientation" (2001: 4) and, in *The Way the Crow Flies*, MacDonald demonstrates how, during such historical moments, the re-consolidation of state ideologies and identities

functions through their private enactment by national subjects. How and why heteronormative monogamous marriage became meaningful to the processes of state formation and nation building in Canada and the United States has been a productive site of feminist research. Anne McClintock has written extensively about the ways in which *"*[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space" (1997: 90) and Amy Brandzel positions marriage laws as a "primary site for the production of normative citizenship and a key mechanism by which nation-states produce a properly heterosexual, gendered, and racialized citizenry" (2005: 177). Elaborating on the ways in which the family trope is important for nationalism, particularly as a way of organizing national time and history, McClintock writes:

> First, it offers a 'natural' figure for sanctioning national hierarchy within a putative organic *unity* of interests. Second, it offers a 'natural' trope for figuring national time. After 1859 and the advent of social Darwinism, Britain's emergent national narrative took shape increasingly around the image of the evolutionary family of man. The family offered an indispensable metaphoric figure by which national difference could be shaped into a single historical genesis narrative. Yet a curious paradox emerged. The family as *metaphor* offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an *institution* became void of history and excluded from national power. The family became, at one and the same time, both the *organizing figure* for national history and its antithesis. (1997: 91, emphasis in original)

McClintock's analysis elucidates the double signification of not only the family, but intimate structures in general. She highlights the contradictory implications of the intimate sphere and the family as void of history and state power, and yet, simultaneously, capable of

representing both.[65]

The McCarthys are a military family, which means that they are frequently relocated, each time to an architecturally similar yet geographically distant base. Unable to situate their family's story in a particular place, Jack and Mimi instead produce their family history through an elaborate private memory culture, specifically through the recitation of speech acts they call "remember-whens". Luhmann describes "remember-whens" as "the ritualized recastings of past family events into happy memories by way of slide shows and storytelling. These are central to the construction of the McCarthys as a happy family even, or particularly, in the face of loss or difficulty" (96).[66] "Remember-whens" are meaningful in that, through the curation, re-visioning, and re-telling of memories, they construct a particular image of the McCarthy family. Moreover, they produce an affective time and space of togetherness within which the family gathers to tell stories and watch slide shows. MacDonald describes this, writing: "After supper, a solemn rite. To do with love and loss. The loss of the past, and it's transformation into precious memory. This alchemical feat always includes popcorn" (127). The spatial arrangement of the slide show transforms the viewing of photographs into a cinematic event, bringing the McCarthy's together in a warm, darkened space, where they eat popcorn and view the enlarged projection of their history on the wall. Here we see how these rituals not only represent family memories, but generate them. While shuffling through the catalogue of photographs, one appears of "a tiny bundled

[65] McClintock also reads this as gendered and racialized, writing: "Because the subordination of woman to man and child to adult was deemed a natural fact, hierarchies within the nation could be depicted in familial terms to guarantee social difference as a category of nature. The metaphoric depiction of social hierarchy as natural and familial – the 'national family,' the global 'family of nations,' the colony as a 'family of black children ruled over by a white father' – depended in this way on the prior naturalizing of the social subordination of women and children within the domestic sphere" (1997: 91).

[66] In *How to Do Things with Words* John Austin describes a speech act as an utterance which, when executed under the appropriate conditions, brings about the action that it signifies. He calls those speech acts that are successful in bringing about an action "happy performatives". For a promise to be "happy" requires conditions such as, for example, the intention to keep the promise, and that the appropriate conditions exist for the promise to be kept. Thinking about "remember-whens" as speech acts is useful in that it draws attention to their performative and constitutive function, but also their aspirational and precarious nature.

Madeleine in a baby carriage perched atop a snowbank. 'I remember that,' [Madeleine] says" (ibid.). In this scene, the improbability of Madeleine remembering being a baby is not important. Instead, MacDonald's text signals the instability of the boundaries between memory and imagination, particularly during childhood. At the heart of this private memory culture lies the romanticized account of how Jack and Mimi first met. "The Story of Mimi and Jack" recurs throughout the novel, its telling both frequently requested by the children, and used as a tool of distraction by Mimi, who tells it in the novel's first pages in order to interrupt Madeleine's worried questions about the war. Later, when the family have reached their destination and are spending one last night in a motel before settling into their new home,

> Madeleine asks her mother to tell The Story of Mimi and Jack. "*Oui, conte-nous ça, Maman,*" says Mike, snug in the extra bed. And Mimi tells the story. "Once upon a time there was a little Acadian nurse called Mimi, and a handsome young air force officer named Jack …" (40)

That "The Story of Mimi and Jack" begins during war time is significant. It does the work of overwriting the violence and trauma of wartime with the romance of their love story, recasting WWII as the fateful event out of which their happy family emerged, rather than the catastrophic event that it was. The story of the Canadian nation legitimized by the state is constructed in a similar way: Canada's military participation in WWII is foregrounded in terms both heroic and moralistic, while the internment of the Japanese, turning away of Jewish refugees, and complicity in harbouring criminals of war in the post-war period are all disavowed.[67]

I read the private memory culture of the McCarthy family not only as reflecting the

[67] See, for example, Mona Oikawa (2012): *Cartographies of Violence: Japanese Canadian Women, Memory, and the Subjects of Internment*; and Andrew Baldwin, Laura Cameron and Audrey Kobayashi eds. (2011): *Rethinking the Great White North*.

discursive production of Canadian national identity, but also as producing what Sara Ahmed refers to as a "happiness commandment" (2010: 58). Ahmed describes "conditional happiness" as being a state whereby one is instructed to find happiness in the right place for the sake of one's own happiness and the happiness of someone else. Using the example of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's novel Émile (1762), in which the character Sophy's father issues a "happiness commandment" in demanding that she marries. Ahmed writes that

> for the daughter not to go along with the parents' desire for her marriage would not only cause her parents unhappiness but would threaten the very reproduction of the social form. The daughter has a duty to reproduce the form of the family, which means taking up the cause of parental happiness as her own. (2010: 58, emphasis in original)

In *The Way the Crow Flies*, the happiness commandment repeatedly issued to Madeleine is not marriage (although it does surface subliminally in this form later, via the rejection of her lesbian identity), but rather that she "think nice thoughts" (14). I will look more closely at Madeleine's relationship to this happiness commandment later in the chapter. Here I am interested in how it becomes apparent that if Jack and Mimi do have a "cause of parental happiness", this cause is not a specific event or condition but rather happiness itself. Specifically, their drive is to understand their family as the embodiment of such happiness.

In the first pages of *The Way the Crow Flies*, MacDonald juxtaposes her protagonist Madeleine's anxious and, at times, morbid internal dialogue with the peaceful scene within which she is located. Descriptions of the warm pastoral landscape and the McCarthy family's cheerful journey towards their new home are repeatedly interrupted by Madeleine's worried thoughts and questions: "'Dad, are they going to blow up the earth?' she asks" (19). Madeleine's inability to compartmentalize the recent violence of the War, the very real dangers of the present geo-political landscape, and the contentment and security that she is

meant to feel in the car with her family, is understood by her family as not only out of place, but impolite. Her father laughs at her question but she detects his irritation:

> "What are you worrying about that for?" He sounds a little offended, as though she has been rude. It's rude to worry about the earth blowing up when your dad is right there in the front seat driving. After you've had ice cream and everything. (ibid.)

As the daughter of a Royal Canadian Air Force Officer, who has just left post-war Germany and resettled in Cold War-era Canada, it is not surprising that Madeleine's character might be preoccupied with such worries. However, her uneasiness is immediately foreclosed as not only laughable, but affectively inharmonious, disrupting the happiness of the family and offending her father. MacDonald's attribution here of shame to Madeleine is repeated throughout the novel, manifesting itself more blatantly as she becomes keenly aware of the ways in which her bad affect misaligns her with her family. Madeleine understands her negative affect as something that can ruin her family's good time. It is shameful and inappropriate in terms of her identity both as a girl and as a child. Madeleine is a child attempting to come to terms with not only a major geographic re-location but also a political one. MacDonald describes her protagonist's process of arbitrating this disorientation, writing:

> They stop for bratwurst and crusty white rolls, just like home. Germany, that is. Madeleine knows she must cease to think of Germany as home. This is home now – what she sees out the sunny car window […]. Immense fields, endless miles between towns, so much forest and scrub unspoken for. Crown lands, shaggy and free. Three days of driving through geological eras, mile after mile and still Canada. The vastness is what sets it apart from Germany. Part of what makes it Canada. "You could take the whole of Europe and lose it here in the middle of Ontario," says her father.

> Madeleine leans her chin on the window frame. Picture the war in Europe, the planes and tanks and concentration camps, picture Anne Frank writing her diary. Hitler saluting the crowds. There is more than enough room for all of it to have happened in the province of Ontario. (15)

Madeleine's worries and moments of unexplainable sadness are not without cause or origin.[68] If by simply *experiencing* these negative emotions Madeleine becomes a kind of "affect alien" within her family and community, by *articulating* them, or even allowing them to be detected, she becomes what Ahmed calls a "feminist killjoy". Ahmed claims that "classical conceptions of happiness involve the regulation of desire" (2010: 240). Within this structure, "[a]ppropriate desire is expressed in an appropriate way toward appropriate objects" (ibid.). An "affect alien", then, refers to those who "do not desire in the right way" (ibid.). Similarly, Ahmed's notion of the "feminist killjoy" describes someone who disturbs the fragility of peace by pointing out injustice. If, as Ahmed writes, feminists "kill joy simply by not finding the objects that promise happiness to be quite so promising" (ibid.), I read Madeleine, in her inability to unreservedly participate in her parents' fantasy of happiness, as just such a figure. Furthermore, Madeleine's refusal to divorce the Canadian landscape around her from its own violent past or from the violence of the world at large, marks her as affectively alien not only from her family, but from the project of nation building at hand during this period. Thus, the "happiness commandments" of the McCarthy family function as attempts to bring Madeleine into line:

> "If it hadn't been for the war," says Mama, "Papa and I would never have met" – Madeleine squirms – "and you and Michel would never have come along …." Her mother has a way of shifting a subject into a tilted version of itself. Stories of bombs

[68] Madeleine experiences not only anxiety and worry, but also unpredictable moments of deep sadness, often connected to what she senses to be the fleeting temporality of childhood and the mortality of her parents. MacDonald writes that watching her brother in the car, "Madeleine's throat feels sore – she is tempted to poke him, make him mad at her, then she might stop feeling sad for no reason" (20).

> and gas chambers do not go with the story of the air force dance in England where her parents met – The Story of Mimi and Jack. Maman sings, "Underneath the lantern, by the barrack gate …." And that's it for any serious discussion of war. (15)

Here I have read her parents' attempts to affectively reorient Madeleine as ultimately enacted out of genuine care for her and for their family. In the next section, I analyze Madeleine's sexual abuse and read it as representative of a more violent aspect of this same project of the post-war reconsolidation of gender and nation.

5.3 The Happiness Commandment of Childhood

If, as I have claimed, Madeleine's character can be read as an affect alien, or feminist killjoy, her sexual abuse might be understood as a mechanism of the reconsolidation of gender roles that I have discussed earlier in relation to her parents. While Kathleen's rape, impregnation, and eventual death coincide with the Armistice in *Fall on Your Knees*, in *The Way the Crow Flies*, Madeleine's abuse occurs following rather than during the War. However, like Kathleen, Madeleine is wilful both inwardly and outwardly and the sexual violence that she experiences can be seen as a disciplinary mechanism whereby pre-war gender ideals are violently reinforced.[69] I argue that this is demonstrated in part by the fact that MacDonald locates Madeleine's abuse as taking place at school. In *The Way the Crow Flies*, the McCarthy family are, more than the average Canadian family, deeply embedded within the institutions of the state. They reside on a military base, and a governmental conspiracy is instrumental in the difficulties that they encounter as a family. Jack's involvement with a

[69] Sexual violence is not only a disciplinary mechanism in Madeleine's abuse. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, the connection between sexual violence and structural gender equality have been thoroughly examined. See, for example, the work of Susan Griffin (1971): "Rape: The All-American Crime"; Susan Brownmiller (1975): *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*; and Ann Cahill (2001): "A Phenomenology of Fear: The Threat of Rape and Feminine Bodily Comportment".

state espionage leads not only to his implication in the false imprisonment of a young man, but also to his failure to recognize or put an end to the sexual abuse of his daughter.[70]

In her body of work, MacDonald has created a series of extraordinary female protagonists – Kathleen and Frances Piper, Madeleine McCarthy, and Mary Rose McKinnon, who I will examine in the next chapter – each of whom might be considered as part of an archive of wilful girls. For Ahmed, to be read as wilful "involves the attribution of negative affect to those bodies that get in the way, those bodes that 'go against the flow' in the way they are going. The attribution of wilfulness is thus effectively a charge of killing joy" (2010b). Ahmed gives the example of her own experience as a feminist within a conservative family, writing that: "To be attributed as wilful is to be the one who 'ruins the atmosphere'" (ibid.). This attribution has, she claims, taught her "a great deal about rolling eyes" (ibid.).[71] To be wilful, then, is to be seen as going against the affective flow, as being the one who is causing the problem by way of pointing out a problem that already exists. If, in some cases, as Ahmed claims, to be wilful can lead to "rolling eyes," what MacDonald's archive of female protagonists shows is that to be attributed the quality of wilfulness can also lead to more explicitly violent consequences. Thus, while happiness may appear as an innocent or well-meaning commandment, the severe consequences of not adhering to it reveal its disciplinary force.

In addition to being wilful, as children, MacDonald's female protagonists are knowing, and often uncannily so. In *The Way the Crow Flies*, Madeleine demonstrates this quality of knowingness in the novel's opening scene through her sharp – yet unwelcome – observations about the world around her. In addition, she is able to detect the fragility at the

[70] The sexual abuse of Madeleine and several of her classmates always occurs immediately after the end of school hours. On one occasion, Jack plans to come to the school to speak with Mr. March, but is side-tracked by a plan to meet Fried, the war criminal.

[71] Ahmed continues, saying that if to be understood as a feminist is to encounter "rolling eyes", to be understood as a lesbian is to encounter "raised eyebrows" (2010).

heart of not only her father's masculinity but also adulthood more generally, frequently describing her parents, particularly Jack, as "innocent" (31). This is made painfully explicit via her inability to reveal to her parents that she is being abused by her teacher. Madeleine not only feels that she is to blame, but also that while she is strong enough to endure the abuse, her parents are not strong enough to endure the knowledge of it. MacDonald's descriptions of both Madeleine's shame, and her compulsion to protect her parents' innocence, are consistent with the experience of children who are survivors of abuse, who consider it to be not only a personal violation, but a violation of their parents. Intuiting the culturally constructed notion of childhood, whereby she is presumed to be innocent, and the inability of her father to cope with the reality of the violence to which she has been subjected, Madeleine participates in the family fantasy of happiness and reinforces Jack's fantasy of himself as the protective figure at the head of this constellation.[72] MacDonald disturbingly communicates the dissociative tendencies of the abused child, writing, "Madeleine eats the ice cream, and smiles like a girl eating ice cream" (216). Yet this performance, and her participation in what I have above framed via Ahmed as a "happiness commandment", has a cost. Describing a later excursion with her father, MacDonald writes:

> Madeleine felt the tang and churn of something deeper than guilt. Something she could not outrun; she had to wait for it to pass like the recurrence of a tropical disease. Shame. Her father would know nothing about it. He was clean. She watched him from the corner of her eye, willing him to keep his eyes from her. If he looked at her now he would see the dark thing. He was squinting into the sky licking his ice cream,

[72] I discussed the figure of the Child in my Introduction as a way in to understanding the figure of the lesbian, through Claudia Castañeda's work in *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (2002). The innocence that is presumed to be an essential part of childhood is discussed by Kerry Robinson and Cristyn Davies in their article "'She's Kickin' Ass, That's What She's Doing!': Deconstructing Childhood 'Innocence' in Media Representations" (2008); by Chris Jenks in his book *Childhood* (2009); and by David Buckingham in his book *The Material Child: Growing up in Consumer Culture* (2011), in which he argues that "the image of the sexual (or "sexualized") child fundamentally threatens our sense of what children should be" (127-128). The Child has been explored more recently as a queer figure by Kathryn Bond Stockton in *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (2009).

so innocent and unconcerned. (628)

Here, two recurring motifs appear. Ice cream becomes attached in the novel not to childhood enjoyment, but rather to the innocent adult satisfaction of providing a child with that which they think the child must enjoy. Madeleine's affect of shame is introduced in the novel's first scene in which she asks an inappropriate question about wartime and consequently expresses guilt for having brought it up when she has "had ice cream and everything" (19). This juxtaposition recurs in several passages, in which she performs the enjoyment that her father expects of a child eating ice cream while simultaneously suffering from intense guilt and shame related to her abuse. In addition, Jack is described in this passage, and frequently elsewhere in the text, as "squinting into the sky" (ibid.), his eyes not on his daughter or his family but on a sunny horizon. Jack is a devoted husband and father. However, his conviction that he can control the affective and material life of his family through rationality and optimism results in his inability to see the ways in which his family is in danger, and, more importantly and disconcertingly, the ways that he himself puts them in danger.

5.4 Lesbian Existence in *The Way the Crow Flies*

In Chapter Two, I discussed the interweaving trajectories of trauma theory, therapy culture, and feminism. Demonstrating the ways in which feminist scholarship and activism contributed to deeper understandings of the structural origins and impacts of trauma, I elaborated on therapeutic culture as a paradigm shift which powerfully transformed the lives of survivors of abuse, while also framing it as a progress narrative with a tendency to simplify and individualize the complex causes, effects, and possible antidotes to trauma. In Chapter Three, I connected these concepts to configurations of lesbianism as functioning utopically, specifically as this is manifested within the archive of lesbian fiction of the 1980s

and 1990s. Engaging the example of sexualized violence, which figures prominently in many of these narratives, I claimed that the figure of the lesbian, or lesbian existence, is frequently situated within such a narrative trajectory as that which facilitates the protagonists' ability to envision a future and eventual overcoming of abuse. Perhaps more than any of MacDonald's other novels, *The Way the Crow Flies* is indebted to, and securely located within, these literary, political, and theoretical traditions. Margaret Sönser Breen has argued that alongside *Bastard out of Carolina*, *The Way the Crow Flies* is a lesbian *Bildungsroman* in which art holds the reparative narrative function. She writes that "[b]oth novels […] on the level of story and narrative construction, explore how art allows the lesbian protagonists, beginning in their childhood, to tell the story of their abuse and so lay claim to a validating sense of their sexual pleasure, sexuality, and identity" (2009: 95). While I agree with Sönser Breen's generic characterization of the novel, as well as with her claim that art, specifically writing and performance, offers the protagonists a way to work through their trauma, I argue that as a narrative device, lesbian existence fulfils a similar and equally significant function. For Madeleine's character, recovery is not facilitated through one explicit lesbian figure, or solely by her lesbian identity, but rather through three intersecting characters and narrative devices: her therapy, her relationship with her mother, Mimi, and her new romantic relationship with her friend, Olivia. Through this interplay of female relationships and therapeutic processes, Madeleine's character, like the lesbian protagonists in abuse narratives that I discussed in the previous chapters, overcomes the trauma of sexual violence and prevents the continuance of its impact on her life and relationships.

One of the objectives of this dissertation is to challenge the ways in which political and theoretical paradigms frequently follow a generational logic, whereby one is positioned as displacing or surpassing the another. In earlier chapters I have thought about the way that lesbian feminism has been positioned as belonging to an obsolete and essentialist past in

relation to queer theory's present-future, and argued that some of the central tenets of queer theory and politics find their origin in feminist, particularly lesbian feminist, thinking. Re-imagining spaces of intimacy, and interrogating them for their disciplinary force, has been one of the key concerns of both lesbian feminism and queer theory. Feminist and queer thinkers have challenged the ways in which these spaces have been evacuated of power or larger political impact and this forging of connections between the private or intimate sphere and the public sphere has been one of the most significant contributions of both fields. Across this dissertation, I have argued that lesbian intimacy and lesbian existence function utopically within literary texts. However, it has not been my claim that such texts always straightforwardly position lesbianism as a final, miraculous antidote to trauma, as demonstrated by the complexities and violences that arise in Madeleine's long-term relationship. However, in the next section, I claim that Madeleine's therapeutic engagement with Nina, her relationship with her mother, and her new relationship with Olivia represent an intersection of multiple female intimacies, which in certain ways embody the utopian ideals of lesbian feminism.

After the McCarthy family leaves Centralia, Madeleine represses her memories both of her sexual abuse and of the murder, which she witnessed. However, while she may no longer consciously recollect these experiences, they haunt her in other ways. Her most popular comedic persona, for example, is a perversely humorous character, "Maurice", who is modelled upon her teacher and the perpetrator of her abuse, Mr. March. Theorists and practitioners have pointed out the ways in which the working through of trauma involves processes of unconscious repetition and "Maurice," Luhmann claims, "functions as an unconscious strategy of repetition and therapeutic work" (104). While she effectively and even ingeniously channels her trauma into her creative work, Madeleine simultaneously struggles with dissociation, anger, and paralyzing anxiety attacks. Alongside these mental

health issues, when Madeleine reluctantly begins her therapy with Nina she is in the process of ending her seven-year relationship. Within this dysfunctional relationship, Madeleine has acted out not only her own repressed trauma, but also the effects of the silence that surrounded her father's trauma, which Luhmann refers to as suggesting Maria Yassa's notion of an "emotional mute zone" (102).[73] Although at first resistant to Nina and the therapeutic process, Madeleine slowly begins to recover memories of the year that she spent as a child in Centralia. The practice and outcome of therapy that MacDonald describes here fits within the framework of the feminist therapy paradigm that I have discussed in previous chapters: a linear narrative of abuse, repression, disclosure, recovery, and survivorship. In a session with her therapist, an overwhelmed Madeleine reacts to having recovered the repressed memories of her childhood sexual abuse:

> "If you could go back to that classroom now," asks Nina, "what would you do?"
>
> "I can't change what happened."
>
> "That's true."
>
> "I would" – sorrow comes like sighs, gusts of rain, no longer falling but blowing across fields, dirt roads – "I would say, 'It's okay, I'm here,' and … I would watch."
>
> "Watch?"
>
> Madeleine nods, tears rolling down. *Mum, Dad. Watch me.* "'Cause I can't change it. But at least, if I watched it, she wouldn't have to be alone."
>
> "Who wouldn't?"
>
> "Madeleine. Me." […].
>
> "I didn't know it hurt …." Madeleine cries into her hands. "I didn't know it hurt so much." (700)

[73] Psychoanalysts Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok (1994) have theorized this as the after-effect of secret trauma and, according to Maria Yassa (2002), while actual traumatic events are frequently repressed and cannot be passed down in narrative form to the next generation, they survive in the silence that is produced around the repressed traumatic event. The psychic effects of this silence thus constitutes a new trauma.

Madeleine's desire to act as witness at the event of her own abuse recollects the work of trauma theorists, particularly those whose research focuses on cultural memory and Holocaust Studies. Their call for more intimate forms of memory that are based not upon straightforward or pedagogical projects of memorialization, but instead for a witnessing at the time of death (or in Madeleine's case, abuse), might be read as a queering of the progress narrative of trauma and therapeutic culture. In proposing a "relationship with the dead", or as Simon et al. describe it, bringing "the dead into the present" (qtd. in Luhmann: 102), such relationships with the past evoke the work that I engaged with in Chapter Two by theorists of queer temporalities such as Carolyn Dinshaw, who understand the process of their historiographical research as that of forging affective connections with their dead objects of study. MacDonald foregrounds the inscrutable and complex imbrications of formations such as past, present, and future in terms of the effects of trauma demonstrating in "both the landscape and in the narrative's unfolding, how the violently dead continue to live among and within us" (102).

Having recovered her repressed memories, Madeleine drives to her parents' house. This might be a different kind of road trip from that described in the novel's opening scene, but it is a strangely cheerful one, with Madeleine intending to tell them what happened to her as a child. She is overwhelmed by a sense of well-being at the prospect of this disclosure, particularly the prospect of disclosing the abuse to her father:

> Madeleine feels no sense of dissolving from within, no dread that her hand will wrench the wheel into the Canadian Shield […]. Everything is going to be okay. I'm going home. To my mum and dad.
>
> *What will you do when you get there, Madeleine?*
>
> I will tell my dad what happened to me. And my mother will make me a plate of food […].

> I will say, Dad, someone hurt me.
>
> I will say, Dad, please walk me to school today.
>
> Watch me, Dad.
>
> And I will never again have to wait my turn in the lonely lonely classroom where the clock is always set at five past three […].
>
> There is a way back, after all […]. Once upon a time there was a young air force pilot named Jack and a pretty Acadian nurse called Mimi. (722)

Here, again, Madeleine understands healing as connected to witnessing. She expects that the outcome of telling her father about her abuse will be the same relief that might have been produced had he stopped it, or even had he retroactively been there with her to endure it. Having recovered her repressed memories, and disclosed her abuse to her therapist Nina, Madeleine understands the final step of her recovery to be telling her parents. It is interesting, here, that it is not her mother to whom Madeleine wishes to turn but her father. As demonstrated in my analysis of *Fall on Your Knees*, and as will re-emerge later in my reading of *Adult Onset*, MacDonald's lesbian protagonists follow a pattern whereby they dismiss and disavow identification with their mothers while forming intense attachment to their idealized fathers. This is not dependent upon the quality of the parent: In all three cases, to different extremes, MacDonald reveals failure on the part of the fathers to live up to their idealized roles, and the failure of the daughters to recognize not only the strength of their mothers, but also to see themselves reflected *in* their mothers. A conversation between Madeleine and Mimi articulates this well, when, after being dismissed and nagged by Madeleine upon her arrival at home, Mimi says, half-jokingly: "You call yourself a feminist, but you aren't very nice to your mother" (740).

Arriving at her parents' home after her euphoric drive, Madeleine finds Jack in poor health. The family eat dinner together after which Madeleine sits in the living room with her

father, intending to tell him what happened to her as a child. However, their conversation veers off track and Madeleine reveals to him not her abuse, but instead her belief that she is responsible for Ricky's false conviction. Jack is shocked, and interrupts, finally disclosing the complex details of what unfolded in Centralia and confessing that it is, in fact, he who was responsible for Ricky's imprisonment. Caught off-guard by her father's revelations, and unable to disclose her trauma as intended, Madeleine produces only half a disclosure – that Mr. March has died. Her father interprets this as the reason for her grief when she breaks down crying beside him. Here, once again, MacDonald reveals the blindness and fragility of Jack's masculinity. In this scene, he is comforted by the conviction that he is comforting his daughter. In fact, she has taken on the burden of his confession, and through her own display of vulnerability, is actually providing him with comfort: "He strokes his daughter's head […]. She seems calmer now. He was always the one she came to, and she always allowed herself to be consoled by him. Can a child know what a gift that is to a parent?" (738). Despite this reversal of roles, Madeleine is nevertheless consoled, albeit in a way that she has not expected. This consolation comes through the relief of finally learning that she is not responsible for Ricky's conviction, but also through the intimacy produced by her father's disclosure of his long-held secret: "Madeleine weeps, water leaving her like darkness draining. She yields to this blessed respite. To what remains. Glimpsing once more – from her old hiding place, across the distance of years – her father gently comforting her for what he doesn't know hurt her" (ibid.). Here, MacDonald succeeds in conveying the complexities of consolation and repair. Although Madeleine's disclosure does not unfold as she had intended, she nevertheless feels that she has received the solace that she came home to find.

A similar dynamic unfolds when, after years of silence, Jack finally reveals his secret to Mimi. MacDonald describes the intimacy and relief produced by this scene of

disclosure, writing: "This is what a good wife could do for you if you were of that generation. She could take something terribly dark. Terribly heavy. Corrosive. And in her hands it could shine like a jewel, simply because you had shared it with her. Your Secret becomes Our Secret" (720). Mimi, who mistakenly believed that Jack was hiding an affair with Karen Froehlich, is deeply relieved by Jack's disclosure. However, like in the scene of Jack's confession to Madeleine it is predominantly he who is relieved of a burden, one that has been and will continue to be carried by the women in his family.[74] However, if disclosure has been situated by therapeutic culture as the antidote to trauma, what does the parallel encounter between both Madeleine and her father and Jack and Mimi say about its capacity for reparation? The intimacy produced by these scenes is moving and evocative, however, it is also problematic in terms of the responsibility that Jack ultimately avoids taking for his actions. In disclosing his secret to Madeleine, and understanding it to relieve her of her own burden, Jack's guilt is transformed into satisfaction. Through his daughter's forgiveness, he attains reassurance and peace of mind. I read these scenes as calling into question the political potential of disclosure. For, despite the sense of relief, closure, and closeness that disclosure creates, it does not change the fact that an innocent man has been falsely convicted of a crime, his life inalterably changed. The McCarthy family, in all of their proper Canadian subjecthood, may now experience "blessed respite", while the Froehlich family, with its Jewish Holocaust-survivor father, and adopted Métis son, has been devastated.

Madeleine's father now sleeps soundly in the living room, and MacDonald shifts the scene to the kitchen. We witness Mimi keeping house, performing both the emotional and domestic labour of sustaining her family, in spite of her own numerous traumas such as the loss of her son and the chronic illness of her husband. Madeleine leaves her sleeping father

[74] It is not just the McCarthy women who carry the burden of Jack's silence, but his son, who in response to the distance produced by Jack's secrecy, enlists in the military to please him, and is killed.

and returns to the kitchen, where she resumes her antagonistic conversation with her mother, who is washing the dishes. Abruptly breaking off in the middle of her line of irritated questioning and accusations, Madeleine says:

> "I love you, Maman."
>
> The tap thunks off, Mimi turns and, hands upraised and dripping like a gloved surgeon, comes quickly to her daughter, and hugs her.
>
> Her mother's embrace. Small, hot and strong. Something dark beneath the perfume and Cameo menthol. Salt and Subterranean. Unkillable. (740)

Through their embrace, Madeleine experiences viscerally the unacknowledged weight of her mother's role in their family. Mimi's femininity here is "[s]mall", but also, strikingly, "hot and strong" and "[u]nkillable". The intensity of this moment is brief, however, and soon mother and daughter begin to argue again, discussing Madeleine's lesbian identity, which Mimi has never accepted. Madeleine expresses the pain and disappointment of her mother's rejection, yet, despite MacDonald's description of both women's misery in this realization, they are unable to connect. In this instant, Mimi receives a phone call and, when she hangs up, Madeleine spontaneously, and almost petulantly, blurts out what she initially came to tell her father:

> "You remember my teacher in Centralia?" […]. "He abused us. Me and some other girls."
>
> Mimi turns to her daughter and hangs up the phone – then looks back at her hand as though surprised at its initiative.
>
> "It's okay, Maman, I'm fine, I'm only telling you because – "
>
> A sound like chirping, it's her mother, hand cupped in front of her mouth; she looks as though she's about to cough something up, a feather.
>
> "Maman?" […].

> Madeleine has never seen her mother cry like this. Not even when Mike went away. Fresh sorrows reactivate old ones. We go to the same well to grieve, and it's fuller every time […].
>
> She is amazed by what her mother says next:
>
> "I'm so sorry, *ma p'tite, c'est ma faute, c'est la faute de maman*." […].
>
> Everything is going to be okay. What is this dark feeling? Mortal happiness. Here is the wound. It doesn't smell after all. It hurts terribly but it's clean. Here is a fresh dressing, let Maman do it. […].

Madeleine's relief is enabled not only by her mother's expression of grief, but also by her assumption of guilt and her apology. In this moment, Madeleine finally allows herself to be consoled by her mother. Disclosure has not provided her with the witnessing that she longed for, but rather with the care and acknowledgement that she couldn't ask for as a child, because of the necessity to keep her abuse a secret.

> Mimi wipes Madeleine's face with her hands – thoroughly like a mother cat – then digs a tissue from her sleeve and holds it to her daughter's nose. Madeleine blows and laughs.
>
> Mimi smiles. "You're so pretty, *ma p'tite."*
>
> "I take after you."
>
> Mimi glances toward the living room. The top of his head hasn't moved, he is still asleep in his chair. She lowers her voice. "Did you tell your father?"
>
> "No."
>
> "Good."
>
> And Madeleine is certain now that it was good, is grateful not to have burdened him.
>
> Her mother can take it. *Women are stronger.* (744)

Intimacy – and the relief that comes with intimacy's confirmation – is produced between

Mimi and Madeleine through the disclosure of the latter's abuse. It is also produced through their final, mutual acknowledgment of Jack's inability to cope with this knowledge. In this passage, Madeleine finally recognizes her mother's strength as well as the force of her mother's love for her. However, such a confirmation of Jack's essential inability to cope with the realities faced by the women in his family reveals an essential paradox within the novel. In adhering to the strictly enforced codes of 1960s gender roles, Jack is never given the opportunity to truly support his wife and children. Set up to fail by a system that demands he maintain his authority at all costs, even a devoted father such as Jack is unable to provide the happiness that he so deeply desires for them.

The third relationship that I explore in this section is that between Madeleine and Olivia. Madeleine's relationship with Olivia combines the pleasures of a new lover with the ease and care of a close friendship. MacDonald writes of their first encounter:

> Olivia's secret identity is revealed in the kiss. The amazing transformation works in both directions: she turns back into Madeleine's friend when they are talking. Colleague, critical, argumentative […]. Being lovers with Olivia is like wrapping the present and tying on the bow after you have been enjoying it for years. Backwards, perfect. Everyone should fall in love with a friend. (695)

This reparative triangulation of mother–therapist–lover is intimated by MacDonald through her paralleling of Olivia and Mimi. Olivia's resemblance to Mimi emerges on a sensory level: "Olivia smells like sand and salt, a tang of sweat and Chanel. Old-fashioned feminine. Skilfully juxtaposed with the pink hair and multiple earrings" (695), as well as through Madeleine's repetition of the endearments uttered earlier in the novel between Jack and Mimi: "'You're so sweet,' she says. *You run so sweet and clear*. She opens her eyes, keeps them open. '*C'est pour toi.*' Don't talk. *Take what you want*" (694). Although not Acadian like Mimi, Olivia is French-Canadian, and unlike with Madeleine's previous relationship,

Mimi accepts Olivia right away. MacDonald's text suggests that, having recovered her repressed memories through therapeutic engagement with Nina, and worked through them through disclosure to her mother, the final step is a healthy relationship with Olivia, for which Madeleine is finally prepared.

These three interlocking relationships work together in Madeleine's life to invoke both therapeutic culture and Rich's conception of lesbian existence: those "forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (1980: 192). Expanding upon Rich's words, I read MacDonald's text as poignantly expressing the ways in which patriarchy produces trauma not only via "male tyranny", but, as can be seen through the example of the McCarthy family, male fragility. The powerful healing effects of therapeutic culture, memory and witnessing at the level of both the personal and the political, and their importance as pedagogical projects of national remembrance, are clear. However, in this chapter, I question whether *The Way the Crow Flies* overemphasizes the singularly reparative force of such processes. Trauma theorists as well as fictional and non-fictional accounts of trauma have established the very real effects of repressed memories, buried histories, and intergenerational haunting. However, what a feminist analysis has contributed, and what I have demonstrated through my examination of "The Story of Mimi and Jack" and the private memory culture of the McCarthy family, is that trauma is reproduced not only through the resonation of its effect, but through its continuing and deliberate use in the consolidation of private and public power.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have positioned post-WWII Canada as a space of rupture, arguing that in

The Way the Crow Flies, the McCarthy family are representative of the post-WWII re-consolidation of Canadian national identity. In examining two plot devices, the private memory culture of the McCarthy family and Madeleine's sexual abuse, I claim that MacDonald reveals the family as a dense and affective site for the discursive and performative production of the nation. I read Madeleine's sexual abuse as representative of the violent, intimate, and gendered ways in which disobedient or, as Ahmed would say, "wilful", subjects are disciplined. Finally, in locating Madeleine's recovery from her childhood abuse within the theoretical and political traditions of therapeutic culture and lesbian existence, I have argued that Madeleine's narrative recites a familiar trajectory of abuse, repression, recovery, and survivorship, securely locating it within an archive of lesbian novels which foreground trauma. "The Story of Mimi and Jack", like that of the Canadian nation itself, originates in violence, and Jack and Mimi McCarthy's desire to revise their own history reflects those larger projects of nation building premised on locating violence elsewhere. In this novel, the evocative nature of the intimacies created by MacDonald, is at odds with the traumatic events that unfold as the novel progresses. Despite their good intentions, eventually all of the characters become implicated, and, beyond them, MacDonald powerfully implicates the Canadian nation.

At the end of the novel, having finally disclosed her experience of childhood sexual abuse to her mother, Madeleine experiences peace of mind for the first time in over a decade. MacDonald describes her relief, writing: "Madeleine is able to follow her mother's voice. In it she hears the cadence of comfort. What remains may not be a lot, but it's good. I have my mother. She steps into the meadow, unafraid, there are no hunters here. Basks in her mother's gaze, unashamed, so grateful to finally be seen." (746). At its best, this is what intimacy makes possible: a space free of shame, within which you may be protected, safe, and truly seen. In situating a good family in close proximity to trauma, MacDonald reveals

the impossibility of intimate structures to ever live up to their promise, as well as the violence embedded within their parameters. However, within the dissonances produced by this proximity, Macdonald succeeds in producing spaces of possibility. In my Introduction, I thought about queerness as a form of surprise about the diversity of intimacies and the ways in which they transform us. *The Way the Crow Flies* could be criticized both for its romanticized portrayal of the post-WWII domestic sphere, and conversely for its excessive and even didactic use of individual and collective trauma. However, it is out of the careful juxtaposition of these institutions, events, and encounters that unexpected intimacies emerge, within which MacDonald ultimately locates transformative potential.

6 Queer Disorientation in *Adult Onset*

6.1 Introduction

Each of Ann-Marie MacDonald's three novels – *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), *The Way the Crow Flies* (2003), and *Adult Onset* (2014) – was published after a gap of almost a decade. Although they vary in terms of setting, time, and subject matter, they share, like the novels discussed in the section above, a close engagement with the commonly twinned themes of childhood abuse and lesbian sexuality. The two decades that elapsed between the writing and publication of each novel coincided with the rapid advancement of various forms of social and cultural recognition and formal legal equality for gays and lesbians, as well as transformations within the academic, political, and cultural institutions of feminist and queer politics and theory.[75] This was and continues to be accompanied by vehement debates within feminist and queer communities about the political utility of such advances and their capacity to meaningfully improve life chances for the most vulnerable women and LGBT people.[76] In this chapter, I will read MacDonald's most recent novel against the backdrop of these advances, particularly considering it within the context of the shift from LGBT and feminist to queer politics and theory as well as the increasing mainstream acceptance of feminism and LGBT rights. In Chapter Three, I explored the tendency for literary representations of childhood sexual abuse written in the 1980s and 90s to figure lesbianism,

[75] Canada, where all three novels are set, decriminalized homosexuality in 1968 and same-sex marriage was gradually introduced beginning in 2003 on a province-by-province basis. In 2005 Canada became the fourth country in the world and the first country outside of Europe to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide via the enactment of "The Civil Marriage Act". Same-sex adoption is legal in all provinces. Laws against discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing, and public and private accommodation have been enacted at a national level and laws banning discrimination based on gender identity and expression vary throughout the provinces and territories.

[76] See, for example, Lisa Duggan (2002); Jasbir Puar (2007); and Ryan Conrad (ed.) (2010). In *The Wedding Complex* (2002), Elizabeth Freeman positions legalized same-sex marriage as a "private economic solution to large-scale, structural problems like the collapse of the health care system, increasingly restrictive immigration policies, and the shredding of the social safety net." (497).

lesbian existence, and lesbian feminism as a means by which women could overcome histories and circumstances of abuse. In this chapter, I focus on *Adult Onset*, whose engagement with childhood abuse, particularly in relation to feminist politics and lesbian sexuality, is more ambivalent. This literary work, I suggest, may help us to assess shifts in the ways in which we engage sexual and gender politics, romantic intimacy, and therapeutic culture, in the navigation, politicization, and transcendence of painful histories of abuse.[77] Furthermore, I argue that in these texts, MacDonald's focus is not only upon the punctual events of childhood trauma, such as incest and rape, but more broadly upon the impact of the ongoing and everyday accumulation of what Maria Root theorizes as "insidious trauma" (1992). Exploring the text's profusion of affects such as disorientation and shame, I engage the paradigm of insidious trauma to argue that in *Adult Onset*, MacDonald questions whether the effects of not only the punctual events of childhood trauma, but also the violence of forms of social marginalization, such as sexism and homophobia, can be so straightforwardly overcome by the resolutions or 'happy endings' provided by therapy culture, or state or familial acceptance of (some) queer lives. Ultimately, in this chapter I attempt to think *through* and *with* this text in order to explore the complex ways in which feminist and queer subjects attempt to locate and re-orient themselves in a present marked by both unprecedented progress and unprecedented loss.

[77] My use of the terms 'therapeutic culture' or 'therapy culture' is not aligned with that of scholars such as, for example, Frank Furedi, whose 2004 book *Therapy Culture* constitutes an attack on vulnerability. Furedi labels the growing integration and acceptance of therapy as a medicalization of normal human behaviour, an exaggeration of the consequences of trauma and violence, and even as the enfeeblement of modern society. Rather, I use the term to refer specifically to a trajectory within feminist theory and politics that prioritizes and politicizes disclosure and 'speaking out' as a means of healing and liberation, and of emphasizing the structural nature of childhood and gender-based violence over its intimate or private dimensions.

6.2 The Disorientation of Queer Normativity

The Way the Crow Flies, like the previous novels explored in this chapter, recites a particular trajectory of abuse and recovery: a familiar narrative which typically moves from innocent child, to victim of abuse, to damaged and repressed adult – an account of memory and disclosure, culminating in survivorship.[78] In turning to *Adult Onset*, I argue that MacDonald challenges this progress narrative, refusing both its protagonist Mary Rose, and its reader, any legible or coherent account of her childhood experiences or the ways in which they continue to structure her adult life. I argue that in *Adult Onset*, MacDonald's provocation is twofold and somewhat contradictory, articulating contemporary conflicts among and within generations of feminists. *Adult Onset* could be read as suggesting that the imperatives of survivor discourses have been internalized to the point of producing their own pathology. However, one might also read MacDonald's narrative as questioning whether the ever-expanding jurisdiction of the heteronormative family functions in part to undo feminist progress around the politicizing and making public of women's experiences of abuse. More specifically, *Adult Onset* seems to demand that we ask: does the recuperation of the queer subject into normative institutions such as marriage evacuate same-sex intimate relationships of their transformative potential, while creating a backwards movement towards the conditions of repression and silence fostered by the heteropatriarchal family?

Adult Onset begins with a description of its protagonist, Mary Rose MacKinnon – mother of two and acclaimed author of young-adult fiction – in her home in modern-day downtown Toronto. Her wife Hilary, a theatre director, is out West working on a production,

[78] The differentiation between the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' comes out of feminist political and scholarly work around trauma. Rosaria Champagne writes that: "A survivor […] is someone […] who comes to understand – through therapy or feminism or some combination of the two – how the experience of childhood sexual violence is 'political.'" She goes on to claim that the "difference between a survivor of violence and a victim of violence is the political meaning made of the traumatic experience and its resulting and residual aftereffects of abuse" (1996: 2).

and Mary Rose is alone at her kitchen table, attempting to answer an email to her father while simultaneously preparing dinner and caring for her young toddler and aging dog. The shifting temporalities of the novel are disorienting, interweaving the third-person account of her day-to-day management of the children and household with flashbacks to her childhood, her mother Dolly's life, and fragments from her novels. MacDonald inaugurates this confusion in the first pages with a scene of a particular kind of chaos, one which is perhaps all-too familiar to a contemporary reader:

> In the midway of this, our mortal life, Mary Rose MacKinnon is at her cheerful kitchen table checking e-mail. It is Monday. Her two-year-old is busy driving a doll stroller into the baseboard, so she has a few minutes.
>
> *Your 99 friends are waiting to join you on Facebook* …She skips guiltily over unanswered messages and cute links sent by friends … and is about to close it down when her laptop *bings* in time with the oven and the incoming e-mail catches her eye […]. She gets up and slides a tray of vine-ripened tomatoes into the oven to slow-roast – they are from Israel, is that wrong? […].
>
> She returns to the table, its bright non-toxic vinyl IKEA cloth obscured by bills and reminders for service calls she needs to book for the various internal organs of the house. *Bing! Your 100 friends are waiting …* (13)

Mary Rose moves through the pages in a state of frantic disorientation and the text produces and transmits this affect by means of various literary devices – her psychological state taking aesthetic form. Half-finished tasks collide with half-finished sentences as the banal yet persistent disruptions of daily life interrupt not just Mary Rose, but the reader as well, who is held at a distance by MacDonald's refusal to provide a vantage point outside of the narration of Mary Rose's agitated and fragmentary stream of consciousness. We follow Mary Rose through her daily errands in the gentrified Annex neighbourhood of Toronto,

swept along with her from the Montessori school attended by her five-year-old son to the organic supermarket, from doctor's appointments to play-dates at the jungle gym, to Starbucks and Tim Hortons and a bra-fitting with her mother at a local lingerie shop. Mary Rose answers (and avoids) phone calls and obsessively writes, deletes, and re-writes the first line of an email: "*Dear Dad, I …*". Her inability to focus on one task is imbedded in the text via the frequent repetition of phrases such as "the cursor blinks", "the phone rings", and the exclamatory "*Ring-Ring*!". This protagonist, like MacDonald herself, belongs to the generation of people who have perhaps most acutely experienced the shifting status of gays and lesbians in Western society. Here and throughout the novel, technology, in its insistence and persistence, functions as the material manifestation of such change and the disorientation that accompanies it.

Adult Onset chronicles a week in the life of Mary Rose, as she struggles not only with the daily management of her family, but with a darker issue: the spectre of a barely-contained rage, which emerges unpredictably and expresses itself via various forms of self-harm and, most troublingly, in violent impulses towards her two-year-old daughter Maggie. Meanwhile, chronic pain from a childhood medical condition – juvenile bone cysts – has re-emerged, triggering unsettling and partially-formed memories of the time in which it was acquired.[79] Mary Rose becomes fixated on the notion that the illness might be the result of childhood abuse, the memory of which she assumes she must have repressed. Convinced that if she could only unearth its origin, she would be able to overcome her emotional volatility and its manifestation as rage towards Maggie, Mary Rose excavates this osseous site of trauma with archaeological fervour, consulting with medical experts and obsessively googling her symptoms. Meanwhile, recollections of days as a toddler, spent alone with a

[79] One of the sources of Mary Rose's extensive online research tells her that: "A bone cyst is a benign (non-cancerous), fluid-filled cavity in the bone which weakens the bone and makes it more likely to fracture (break). It occurs mostly in children and young adults. It is not known what causes bone cysts" (321).

young mother who was suffering from immobilizing post-partum depression, are frustratingly fragmentary, yet have the capacity to undo Mary Rose at unexpected moments, launching her and the reader into the scene of a confusing and disturbing past.

Some critical responses to *Adult Onset* have criticized MacDonald for this profusion of seemingly banal descriptive detail.[80] However, I argue that such description facilitates a nearly instantaneous absorption into the disorienting temporality of Mary Rose's consciousness, obscuring readerly attempts to access or sort out her scattered recollections. Indeed, I claim that disorientation – alongside shame, which I will discuss later – is the primary affect in this novel, moving within and beyond the text and calling into question the reliability of the protagonist's narration and memories. If the reader is drawn into this inquiry, they are simultaneously compelled to question the utility of and motivations behind the desire to recover such memories. In this chapter, I argue that the fundamental impossibility of deciphering in retrospect exactly what caused Mary Rose's bone condition, the extent of her mother's physical and emotional abuse, or the suggested occurrence of extraneous sexual abuse, raises some exacting questions for a contemporary readership: Can one exorcise a traumatic history by simply making it visible? Is this "making visible" of trauma *necessary* in order to prevent it from becoming displaced onto something (or someone) else? Does a focus on the explicit and punctual events of childhood trauma – specifically abuse or incest – obfuscate the proliferation of unspecified yet ubiquitous traumas that children and adolescents experience in the form of structural inequalities? Has the violence embedded within the structure of the family been minimized via the inclusion of gay and lesbian subjects into its jurisdiction? Finally, if MacDonald's novel does not offer

[80] See, for example, Emily Donaldson's review in *The Star*: "What stymies the novel isn't the quality of MacDonald's typically limber prose […] but its unnecessarily high narrative thread count. If [sic] feels like about a third of our time is spent on the dreck and dross of parenting (battles over clothing, naps, potentially dangerous objects) and on establishing Mary Rose's urban liberal bona fides (she washes fruit whose rind is inedible, worries that her vine-ripened tomatoes are from Israel) – both of which strike me as cases where telling, not showing, is absolutely fine" (2004: online).

a straightforwardly redemptive account of the transformative potential of memory, romantic and familial intimacy, or witnessing, disclosure, and therapy, how does it fit into the historical framework of feminist literary deployments of abuse and incest?

6.3 Memory and Therapeutic Culture

> How do you tell yourself something you already know? If you have successfully avoided something, how do you know you have avoided it? Land mines of anger left over from a forgotten war, you step on one by chance. Sudden sinkholes of depression, you crawl back out. A weave of weeds obscures a mind-shaft but cannot break a fall, you get hurt this time. A booby-trapped terrain, it says, "Something happened here." Trenches overgrown but still visible from space, green welts, scars that tell a story. You press on.
>
> Years pass and you become aware of a blind spot. A blank. White as bone. A strip of mind where fear has scorched consciousness clean, obliterated fingerprints, freckles, follicles. Smooth as a stone slab.
>
> As an old scar. (207)

This quotation, situated halfway through her last novel, artfully delimits the central concern of all three of MacDonald's works of fiction: that is, what Caruth describes as "the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing" (1995: 3). The plots of *The Way the Crow Flies* and *Adult Onset* concern adult, lesbian women who are intensely preoccupied with recovering repressed childhood memories – traces of events which, they sense, hold the key to unlocking and resolving their adult dysfunction.[81] As discussed earlier, this trajectory of

[81] Both Madeleine and Mary Rose suffer from anxiety, panic attacks, dissociation, and intense and uncontrollable anger.

repression, recovery, and redemption has been a standard way of constructing narratives of childhood sexual abuse. Such a desire to extricate one's 'authentic' self from a repository of buried memories might be historicized as finding its origins in psychoanalysis. This particular knowledge apparatus insists, as Jacqueline Rose points out, that "childhood is something in which we continue to be implicated and which is never simply left behind"; for this reason, "[c]hildhood persists […] as something which we endlessly rework in our attempt to build an image of our own history" (1993: 12). For Rose, what is significant is, "above all our *investment*" (ibid., my emphasis) in thinking about childhood. This investment – a compulsion to reconstruct the events of our childhood, and our conviction that doing so will provide the key to understanding who we are – continues to influence understandings and processes of therapeutic and self-help cultures. Here, however, I argue that in *Adult Onset*, MacDonald interrogates the veracity of this expectation, revealing the contradiction inherent in the desire for our memories to tell an essential truth about ourselves even as we fail to be sure of their authenticity. MacDonald's scepticism echoes that expressed by numerous feminist theorists, who have questioned, first, whether 'speaking out' is always necessarily transformative, and second, whether such a movement towards recovery has shifted the focus away "from movement politics toward therapeutic culture", in a way that "has become personal rather than social" (Cvetkovich 2003: 33). Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray suggest that "[t]he coercive stance that one must tell, must join a support group, or must go into therapy, is justly deserving of the critique Foucault offers of the way in which the demand to speak involves dominating power and an imperialist theoretical structure" (1993: 281). Cvetkovich also invokes Michel Foucault to elucidate the background for her critique,[82] describing her impetus to write *An Archive of Feelings*, and

[82] In *A History of Sexuality: Volume I* (1998 [1976]), Foucault argued that while the discussion of sexuality was restricted in certain areas (the family, the school, etc), from the eighteenth century on there was in fact an incitement to speak about sex and a proliferation of discourses concerned with sex. For Foucault, this led to the increasing encroachment of state law into the realm of private desire.

reflecting upon the period in her life when she began going to therapy to deal with, among other things, depression. She writes:

> One reason for my scepticism is that the feminist recommendation to tell my story, whether in therapy or more publicly, did not provide emotional relief or personal transformation. My aesthetic sensibility rebelled against this path; I was afraid my story would resemble a clichéd case history from a self-help book. My intellectual training also threw some roadblocks in the way; I was too steeped in Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis to believe that telling the story was going to make a difference – unless the circumstances were very particular. (2003: 3)

Like MacDonald, in thinking about the ways in which acts of remembering and telling are expected to facilitate healing and self-discovery, Alcoff and Gray, Cvetkovich, and others formulate their critique from a position which acknowledges both their personal investments in therapeutic culture as well as its significance in terms of feminist politics and history.[83] Additionally, these scholars simultaneously recognize the transformative potential of storytelling and narrative. In her analysis of *Bastard out of Carolina* and *The Way the Crow Flies*, Sonser-Breen claims that "[a]bove all, [these] novels, written in 1992 and 2003 respectively, demonstrate the power of healing that the telling of personal stories facilitates" (6). While I agree with Breen's reading of these novels, I argue that in *Adult Onset* such a "healing power" is called into question. MacDonald formulates this via the frustrated questioning of Mary Rose's partner Hilary, who challenges Mary Rose's insistence that a specific incidence of childhood trauma is at the root of her dysfunction.

[83] Alcoff and Gray, for example, write: "Our motivation to reflect on these issues emerges from a need to reflect on our own practices. We are two women who share three traits: we are survivors, we work within (and sometimes against) post-modernist theories, and we have been active in the movement of survivors for empowerment and liberation. We have also been affected by the institutionally enforced distancing and dissonance between what gets thought of as 'theory' and 'personal life' which splits the individual along parallel paths which can never meet. This paper is an attempt to rethink and repair this dissonance and to begin weaving these paths – and their commitments, interests and experience – together" (1993: 261).

6.4 Traumatic Memory and Contemporary Disorientation

While Mary Rose is consumed by her need to remember the precise event that might have caused her bone condition, specifically whether it was in fact the result of physical abuse from her mother, Hilary points out that she has enough cause for psychological trauma in the instances of abuse and injury that she does remember – for example, those sustained as a young adult when she came out as a lesbian to her parents. This conflict between these two characters echoes those debates in the field of trauma studies that I have described above: namely, how a traumatic event can be diffuse rather than punctual. Elizabeth Jane Costello refers to this, claiming that "by the age of 16 one person in three has already been exposed to an 'extreme stressor,' as defined by DSM-IV" (qtd. in Cvetkovich 2003: 283), such "extreme stressors" including, for example, poverty. While not discounting the magnitude of punctual incidences of trauma, nor the authenticity of Mary Rose's memories, the utilisation of Hilary's character echoes feminist theorists who have questioned the usefulness of focusing on such events to the exclusion of equally harmful, structural violence.

Mary Rose's flashbacks and recollections reveal the years of painful emotional abuse that followed her coming-out. Descriptions of her mother's frequent and vicious verbal attacks are amplified by the almost more destructive cold acquiescence of her father. Recalling this in a late-night conversation with Hilary, however, Mary Rose attempts to minimize the violence of their behaviour:

> After a few moments, Mary Rose became aware of the peaceful cadence of sleep on Hilary's side of the bed. "Hil? What did you mean, 'it wasn't the first time'?"
>
> Hilary sniffed awake, then said, "When you came out she tried to kill you."
>
> "No she didn't."

"You said she wished you had cancer. She wished you were dead, choking on shit"

"Not 'choking' –"

"She cursed you."

"Exactly, she didn't try to 'kill' me."

"I'm happy for you."

Tug at the duvet, reprised roll-over.

"Why are you being mean now?"

"I'm sorry, that *was* mean, I just …" Hilary turned to her and propped her head on her hand. "They were cruel to you. Young people commit suicide over that kind of thing." (265)

Hilary reinforces Mary Rose's conviction that she has suffered abuse at the hands of her parents; it is not, however, confirmation of the specific abuse that Mary Rose is looking for. She continues to fixate upon patching together a fragmented chronology of childhood injuries and pain in order to confirm a singular incident of physical abuse perpetrated by her mother. She and Hilary discuss this again later during a late-night telephone call during which Mary Rose confesses that she almost hurt Maggie. She also tells Hilary that she has been researching her bone cysts and has found that they can be caused by physical trauma. Childlike in her uncertainty, she attempts to explain:

"It sounds dumb, but maybe the thing with my arm happened 'cause of something that happened." Where have all her words gone. She is an empty Scrabble board […]. "Because it could be possible that bone cysts are caused by repeated trauma. I feel unreal, I feel like I'm making this up, are you there?" Her voice sounds dead […]. "So it's possible it broke before I was four. At least once. Are you there?" (332)

While Mary Rose wonders whether her mother could have broken her arm, causing the initial trauma that resulted in bone cysts, Hilary continues to question why she so desperately

needs to remember the details of one specific incident of childhood physical abuse, when there is a clear pattern of emotional and verbal abuse extending throughout her life: "You have your scars, you have your chronic pain, you have your broken heart at twenty-three, what more do you need? […]. You're obsessing over one event" (ibid.). Mary Rose remains unable to accept this, and responds angrily:

> "It the key to the whole thing."
>
> "It's just one aspect of a pattern of—"
>
> "How can you not know it matters?! I'm talking about a series of events, you're talking about a disco ball."
>
> "A 'disco ball'?"
>
> "'Aspects,' little bits, shiny busted mirror spinning on the ceiling—"
>
> "I don't understand—"
>
> "I don't want the *everythings,* I just want to get my hands on a *something!*" (ibid.)

I read Mary Rose's fixation upon this "something" – a punctual event of trauma – and the significance she believes that it holds in terms of her embodied and psychic existence, as symptomatic of her attachment to a particular form of feminism, specifically feminism as it emerged alongside trauma studies. Without the uncovering of an explicit moment of trauma, she is unable to experience any satisfactory form of resolution, rather having the feeling of grasping for "aspects" and "reflections" of shattered glass. This might also be read as a generational conflict. Hilary is younger than Mary Rose, and can more easily reconcile herself with understanding homophobia, for example, as a form of trauma. Incongruously though, Hilary's attitude, however apparently progressive in its understanding of homophobia as a traumatic experience (a view perhaps only made possible by the contemporary Canadian state's legal sanctioning of anti-homophobia), actually functions through patriarchal assumption. Mary Rose should, Hilary argues, not become so fixated

upon her trauma, but, rather, move on and focus on her role as mother and wife. The ubiquity of homophobia, and Hilary's generationally enabled recognition of it, serves to make invisible the domestic labour that she presumes should be trauma's antidote. She says:

> "I'm sorry, I mean, I live with some of the results of how your mother dealt with her suffering. And I'm not talking about one event. So you have to decide. Do you want to come out of the closet? Or do you want to prove that it wasn't so bad by raising your own children the same way?"
>
> "Hil? … I'm afraid."
>
> "What are you afraid of?"
>
> *I'm afraid of my hands.* (ibid.)

Both women fear the violent repercussions of Mary Rose's unprocessed grief and pain. However, while Hilary considers Mary Rose's preoccupation with uncovering a specific incidence of childhood abuse to be unnecessary, and indeed to be that which will result in her continuing the cycle of abuse, for Mary Rose recovering and working through this memory is the only way by which she can conceptualize overcoming it.

6.5 Progress and Guilt

As I have discussed above, I read Mary Rose's preoccupation with uncovering childhood trauma as anachronistic, revealing affective attachments to particular manifestations of feminism that are being left behind. For Mary Rose, the disorienting temporality of contemporary LGBT rights produces not only a sense of loss, but also one of guilt. Mary Rose, like MacDonald, belongs to a generation of women who did not expect to become a

part of the mainstream, and who thus made their home in the margins.[84] Mary Rose reflects upon the ways in which the political landscape, and subsequently her life, has so quickly shifted:

> She never dreamt she would be married. She never expected to become a mother. She never imagined she would be a 'morning person' or drive a station wagon or be capable of following printed instructions for an array of domestic contraptions that come with some-assembly-required; until now the only thing she had ever been able to assemble was a story […]. A mere three years before Matthew was born, she was living in boozy boho twilight with Renee, three to five cats and the occasional panic attack. Then, in a few blinks of an eye, she was married to blue-eyed, striding Hil, living in a bright, semi-detached corner house, mother of two wonderful children. It was as though she had waved a wand and presto, she had a life. (21)

Mary Rose's guilt is thus doubled. She is self-conscious of the conventional life that she leads with Hilary, and how it has in some ways required her to disavow her feminist principles, but also ashamed of how, having been granted such a life, she cannot be happy.

Mary Rose's agitated and beleaguered state is attended by a barely contained rage, which at various moments throughout the novel is directed towards Maggie. While disturbed by this, Mary Rose is also perplexed, as it is not something that she experienced with her first child, Matthew. Descriptions of interactions with Maggie are merged with Mary Rose's inner monologue – a complicated entanglement of horror, shame, and rationalization. She recognizes the danger that she poses to Maggie and experiences a coinciding feeling of guilt, yet simultaneously consoles and congratulates herself for her restraint and self-knowledge.

[84] MacDonald has described this personal experience in a keynote lecture that given in honour of Pride 2014. "I, like so many others that day, was exiled from my family of origin […] I got used to being in exile. I eschewed the mainstream, leapt into the rapids, got used to the treacherous tributaries, adrenal torrents and gruelling portages. To the point where I wouldn't even have known how to navigate the mainstream […] I had grown up with neither the expectation nor the desire for marriage and children. In fact, I rejected both as patriarchal traps. I was not going to become someone's mother" (*Law Society of Upper Canada* 2014: online)

Following an episode in which she loses her temper with Maggie who is fighting to wear a pair of boots bought for her by her grandmother Dolly, she deliberates:

> Mary Rose has had time to reflect on the debacle with the boots this morning; clearly she had displaced her old anger at her mother onto her child, the ladybug boots having acted as a trigger owing to their association with Dolly – not to mention the ringing of the goddam phone. Armed thus with self-analysis, she speaks the words aloud, 'Never touch your child in anger,' as she applies a fresh bandage to her pierced finger and wonders how people who are less aware and educated than she is manage to avoid murdering their offspring. (221)

Mary Rose is described as "armed with self-analysis" and there is something smug about her recitation of the mantra "Never touch your child in anger". She attributes her ability to restrain herself from harming Maggie, and her capability to understand the triggers and causes of her anger, to her formal and feminist education.

While providing reassurance, this reflexivity also generates feelings of guilt in Mary Rose. Shame and guilt are, alongside disorientation, pervasive affects throughout the novel. They emerge, not only as a response to her adult life but also in Mary Rose's flashbacks, primarily in relation to her father. In addition to feeling ashamed of her unfair rage towards Maggie, Mary Rose experiences shame that is indicative of the complex feelings that she has about finding herself in a position which she never expected to be in – professional and financially independent, accepted by her community and family, and married to her partner. Her unexpected success and the privileges that accompany queer life in the twenty-first century give Mary Rose the sense that she should not complain or be dissatisfied. Likewise, her awareness of the gains made by feminism, of which she has been a beneficiary, signal to her that she should already have overcome any past traumas and be grateful for the ways in which her life is different from her mother or grandmother's. She reflects upon this in the

first pages of the novel, when she both guiltily and ironically admonishes herself in a moment of domestic frustration:

> There is not a single aspect of her life that is not of her own choosing. She has nothing to complain about and much to be grateful for. *For which to be grateful,* corrects her inner grammarian. She came out when homosexuality was still classed as a mental illness by the World Health Organization, otherwise known as the WHO (Me?). She helped change the world to the point where it-got-better enough for her to be here now at her own kitchen table with her own child, legally married to the woman she loves, feeling like a trapped 1950s house-wife. That was a glib thought. Unjust. Unfeminist. Her life is light years away from her own mother's. (19)

While her presumption functions differently, Mary Rose's guilt suggests that she, like Hilary, has expected legal equality to be the antidote not only to present, but also to historical, trauma. Her obsession with recovering memories of abuse from her childhood might also be read as a complex response to this guilt, as such a history of abuse would provide a concrete pathology for why she is not happy, as well as a possible solution. If she could only remember what happened to her as a child, and go through the corresponding therapeutic process, Mary Rose might finally be able to be content with the life that she has. In Mary Rose's self-admonishment, one might hear the echo of post-feminist discourses; Darla Shine, for example, claims that contemporary women have become attached to the notion of "being desperate" and should in fact embrace their feminine roles as mothers and wives. She writes: "Being home in a warm, comfy house floating around in your pajamas and furry slippers while sipping coffee as your babies play on the floor and your hubby works hard to pay for it all is not desperation. Grow up! Shut up! Count your blessings!" (2005: 15). For Shine among others, the unhappiness of women such as Mary Rose is not only irrational, but childish and ungrateful. However, by juxtaposing Mary Rose's daily life

with flashbacks to her mother Dolly's, MacDonald's text forces us to ask: How different is Mary Rose's life from her mother's? In her exertions to be the perfect and grateful wife, mother, daughter, feminist, lesbian, and even grammarian, Mary Rose embodies the complexities and ambivalences inherent in the desire – and necessity – to live all of these identities at once.

In *Adult Onset*, the fraught connections between the stigma of incest and that of homosexuality are again exposed. Echoing a similar dialogue in *The Way the Crow Flies*, Mary Rose's coming-out is met by her mother's demand to know if she has been sexually abused. The shock of Dolly's accusation is amplified by the silent presence of Mary Rose's father, Duncan, in the room:

> "Who touched you?" she took to asking Mary Rose. "Did someone touch you? Did you father touch you?"
>
> The air was shocked.
>
> Her father's gaze remained pinned to the corner of the ceiling – what was it in his own story that enabled him to leave the room without leaving his chair?
>
> *Who touched you?*
>
> It was as though Dolly were telling a story over and over again – or rather, a story was working its way through her.
>
> *Did your father touch you?* (212)

This encounter is further complicated, and becomes something even darker, when Mary Rose turns the question back upon her mother:

> "No, Mum, my father never touched me. Did your father touch you?"
>
> The moment she spoke the words, she felt the coolness against her face like cold water as she understood that reality was what she was in now, and that a moment ago she had been inhabiting a state akin to the drug-induced numbness preparatory

to a surgical procedure.

The light changed in her mother's eye again. She looked like a mischievous child as she replied, "Why would you ask that?" And giggled.

Dolly never posed the question again. (ibid.)

Here, alongside other passages in the text, is the suggestion that Dolly experienced childhood sexual abuse. Knowledge of the violence that her mother and indeed most women from that generation endured, serves to compound Mary Rose's guilt; while she is able to excuse the failures of her own parents, whom she understands as the damaged products of a backwards generation, she cannot so easily forgive herself. Unlike her parents, Mary Rose considers herself to be a part of a generation of women who have been given, alongside privilege, all of the tools with which to understand and work through their comparatively mild trauma.

Despite Mary Rose's lesbian marriage, feminist politics, and upwardly mobile, urban-creative lifestyle, the conditions from which her present psychological breakdown emerges mirror those of her mother almost fifty years earlier. This fits within the thematic trajectory of MacDonald's work, which almost always entails a strong critique of family. In *Adult Onset*, however, lesbian intimacy takes on a new form and, within the framework of marriage, can no longer function as either a placeholder for alterity or a source of transformative energy and potential. MacDonald makes apparent the ways in which, rather than widening the possibilities for transformation that have historically been attributed to lesbian existence, access to marriage has instead immersed Mary Rose in a family structure like the one in which she grew up. Being alone with her children is viscerally evocative of her mother's experience of being isolated with Mary Rose and her siblings in the 1960s. Surprisingly, however, neither this, nor Mary Rose's feminist awareness, facilitates either conscious identification with or sincere sympathy for her mother. Rather, Mary Rose

continues to identify deeply with her father, whom she idealizes even to the point of erasing the emotional harms that he inflicted upon her as a child and young woman. Upon receiving his email in the first pages of the novel, in which he describes seeing an "It Gets Better" video,[85] and his and her mother's subsequent pride in her and her family, Mary Rose thinks:

> Of course it would be Dad who would appreciate the socio-political importance of the video – he was always the rational one, the one who sat still and read books, the one who saw her intelligence shining like a beacon through the fog of her early school failures. What can she say that will encompass how grateful she is, how much she loves him? (18)

Meanwhile, Mary Rose's mother is calling, a call which Mary Rose ignores:

> The phone rings. A long-distance ring … It is her mother. She stares at the phone, cordless but no less umbilical for that. She can't talk to her mother right now, she is busy formulating a fitting reply to her father's e-mail. Her father, who always had time for her. *Ring-ring!* Her father, who never raised his voice; whose faith in her gifts allowed her to achieve liftoff from the slough of despond of childhood. *Ring-ring!* (16)

Mary Rose's almost feverish devotion to her father can in part be attributed to his status as the white patriarch of her family. Indeed, as is the case with Materia in *Fall on Your Knees*, what might be understood as Dolly's mental illness is racialized by her daughter, who idealizes her father as sane, rational, and uniquely invested in and able to recognize his

[85] "It Gets Better" was created in 2010 by columnist and author Dan Savage as a response to a spate of suicides by teenagers who were bullied for being gay. Contributors to the project, often prominent public figures, create short online videos with messages of hope, in which they reassure lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer youth that their lives will "get better". IGB has been critiqued by a number of queer activists and theorists who point out, among other things, the overrepresentation of videos by white, university-educated, gay men, to the exclusion of, for example, women, people from working-class and diverse ethnic backgrounds, and the gender nonconforming. Tavia Nyong'o's critique of IGB has been paraphrased by Jasbir Puar in an article for *The Guardian*: "A mandate to fold into urban, neoliberal, gay enclaves, a form of liberal handholding and upward-mobility that echoes the now discredited 'pull yourself up from the bootstraps' immigrant motto" (Puar 2010: online).

daughter's talent and intellect. Like MacDonald's own mother, both Materia and Dolly are of Lebanese descent, an ethnic identity that is positioned against the whiteness of their fathers.[86] However, despite both Kathleen and Mary Rose's aversion to their mothers and identification with their fathers, both women's creative talents and success can be seen as inheritances from their disavowed, racialized mothers. Such racism makes itself apparent at various points throughout the text, for instance when Mary Rose considers whether or not to take a taxi to the postal station. She thinks:

> Cabs are smelly, the drivers are homophobic immigrants – or is that internalized racism rearing its head? Her own grandfather was a homophobic immigrant, a marrier of child brides, a mumbler of "close your legs." Yes, it is her own internalized racism. Feeling better already for having shed a character flaw, she nonetheless forbears to hail a cab for the psychology-free reason that she cannot have Maggie ride with no car seat. (233)

Once again, Mary Rose's self-censorship and self-analysis result in a complex entanglement of guilt and self-satisfaction, and yet at no point does she associate this acknowledged internalized racism with her own relationship with her mother. Despite her father's complicity in the violence following her coming-out, it is unthinkable to Mary Rose that he could be the perpetrator of the childhood abuse that she suspects caused her illness. These internalized forms of racism and sexism can be understood as insidious trauma, and continue to affect Mary Rose who, while capable of recognizing them at a remove (as in the instance of her characterization of the taxi drivers), cannot see how they function in her most intimate relationships, for example in her animosity towards her mother, her preoccupation with her

[86] Although in *The Way the Crow Flies* Madeleine's mother is a white Canadian, as an Acadian-Canadian she is constructed as racially other, and, like Materia and Dolly, speaks English inflected by another language (in this case French). She is characterized as passionate and volatile and, again like Materia and Dolly, this is attributed to her ethnic otherness. This quality of language influences Mike and Madeleine as it does Mary Rose and Andrew-Patrick, and the sisters in *Fall on Your Knees*. See my discussion in earlier chapters for more on language and otherness in MacDonald's work.

partner's whiteness, or her preferential treatment of her son.

An early source of such trauma can be located within the context of Mary Rose's attachment to her father. Narrated via a flashback to her childhood, Mary Rose, nicknamed MR (Mister), by her family and friends, takes an exuberant car ride with her father. It is at this point that she first comprehends the implications of her gender and associates the impending birth of her youngest sibling – a brother – with the threat of displacement:

> She is sitting on his lap, steering the car – before the days of seat belts and child safety laws. It does not get better than this: you may not be fully toilet trained, but you can steer the car. "That's it Mister, nice and easy, turn the wheel." His hands halo hers as the wheel spools beneath her fingers. There is the smell of diesel and leather. I AM STEERING THE CAR. Over the red dashboard is the horizon of windshield, the clown nose at the centre of the wheel is the horn. "You're a good driver, Mister." I AM A GOOD DRIVER […]. At some point he took to teasing her. "When the boy is born, you'll have to sit in the back seat and he'll steer the car."
>
> "No, I steer."
>
> "Boys sit in the front, girls sit in the back."
>
> "No, me do that."
>
> "No!"
>
> "The boy will be up front with me."
>
> "NO!"
>
> He laughed until she saw his gold tooth. The rage tore up her throat like grit – gone was the horizon over the dash in the blur of an eye, she was turning into a tangle, as if she were scribbling over herself with black crayon, until finally, "I HATE THE BOY!"
>
> Clotted words, flung like ink, she was black but she was back.

> His voice was suddenly sad. "Don't say that, Mister, he's just a baby. He's going to be your little brother."
>
> He looked sad and bewildered. She had hurt him. And she had hurt a poor dear baby. Her own brother. Shame engulfed her, rising from within like the warm, wet odour of pee. "Sorry, Daddy." Tears. (191)

Mary Rose experiences the playful sexism of her father viscerally, as a shutting down of horizons. Her rage, too, is foreclosed – arrested by her father's disappointment and transformed into shame. Such experiences could be understood as fitting into a framework of insidious trauma, by which the process of recognizing her identity as a girl, and thereby losing her status as her father's favourite, begins the subtle sexism that culminates in the explicit homophobia that accompanies her coming-out and subsequent rejection by both parents. While Mary Rose seeks to remember a single incident of physical abuse perpetrated by her mother, here it is the "everyday experiences of sexism that add to effects of more punctual traumatic experiences […]" (Cvetkovich 2003: 32). As Cvetkovich indicates here, insidious and punctual trauma do not operate to the exclusion of one another, but rather represent a complex interplay of experiences and effect. MacDonald's text is not necessarily calling into question the legitimacy of Mary Rose's accusation, but rather problematizing her conviction that it is the definitional episode of her life.

Judith Herman writes that "[t]he conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (1992: 1). As I have explored in previous chapters, in MacDonald's work, the family is the primary site of this "will to deny". Reading her three novels alongside one another makes clear that, on this point at least, she does not differentiate "good" families from "bad" ones. For example, while in *Fall on Your Knees*, James Piper is the main source of danger for the women of his family, in *The Way the Crow Flies*, Madeleine's "good" father cannot protect

her from the sexual abuse that she suffers at school. In fact it is, arguably, her desire to preserve the idealized site of familial innocence and happiness, as well as to uphold her father's masculinity, that facilitates her silence. In *Adult Onset*, Mary Rose's compulsion to uncover repressed memories of historical abuse displaces her wilful repression of memories of recent abuse at the hands of her family. MacDonald discusses the difficulty of her own adjustment to her parents' astonishingly rapid shift from rejection to acceptance. Her coming-out experience echoes that of Mary Rose and she describes it, beginning with her parents' initial reaction. "'I wish you had cancer,' said my mother. Frequently. Among other curses. My father said it with silence. And ice" (*Law Society of Upper Canada* 2014: online). Several short years later, same-sex marriage is suddenly legal, and MacDonald finds herself married to her partner, Alisa Palmer. "Driving back from the east coast with our baby in the infant car seat behind us, in our station wagon, my mother said. *My Mother Said*: 'God bless you and Alisa, you are wonderful mothers, and a lovely couple'. Frequently. Among other blessings" (ibid.). MacDonald, like her protagonist Mary Rose, accepts the unexpected relief of her parents' approval without hesitation. However, as MacDonald points out in the same lecture, referring to the receipt of her own "It Gets Better" email, the past is not so easily buried. She says:

> I was touched. Yet oddly angered. Then swiftly guilty […]. If you forget the past, it grows inside you. My past was locked inside me, growing like a tumour, ticking like a bomb […]. My parents had their change of heart decades ago, but my heart had stayed locked in time. Opening a heart is not pretty – and you may die on the table. My past grew inside me, built up pressure, fumes from the raw mix of love and anger. *A formula for self-hatred that had outlasted the blessings, the babies and the law.* (ibid., my emphasis)

No profusion of blessings can erase the harms caused by the years that MacDonald spent in

exile from her family. Here, as well as in *Adult Onset*, MacDonald is drawing a parallel between the private and public landscape of LGBT lives and rights. The hard-won achievement of formal legal equality and mainstream cultural acceptance cannot erase the harms of a history spent in the margins. As seductive as the unconditional embrace of such recognition might be, it is, for Mary Rose, as MacDonald has articulated, "a formula for self-hatred".

For Mary Rose, this necessary anger is never acknowledged or processed. MacDonald describes her bewildered pleasure at her parents' sudden and unexpected embrace of Hilary in a flashback:

> Hilary smiled, her hair fell forward and caressed her cheek, and Mary Rose swelled with the pleasure of feeling … normal. My girlfriend likes my mother. My mother likes my girlfriend. We're going to have a family. An entire missile base vanished from the landscape. Never mind the resulting crater, it will grow over in time, a slight depression filled with dandelions.
>
> "Do you want babies, Hilary?" asked Dolly?
>
> Hil blushed and nodded, wept and smiled. Dolly stroked her cheek, brown on white. (216)

Like MacDonald, Mary Rose's repressed anger about her parent's treatment of her manifests itself first via self-harm, and is then redirected at her partner, and finally at her daughter. For MacDonald, this shift is a wake-up call, telling her that she must deal with the anger and betrayal of her parents' rejection. However, Mary Rose, not wishing to upset the fragile equilibrium of newly acquired familial peace, seeks the origin of this anger in a childhood experience of trauma. Herman writes: "When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom" (1994: 1). Mary Rose recognizes her

symptoms – violent impulses towards Maggie, panic attacks, and unhappiness. MacDonald is calling into question, however, whether this impulse towards narrativization is too focused on a specific traumatic event. As described earlier in the chapter, the notion of insidious trauma is useful in framing trauma not as a rupture or breakdown in the social or family order, but rather as a normal function of heteropatriarchy.

6.6 Conclusion

In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed describes how the first bestselling lesbian pulp novel, *Spring Fire* (Packer 1952), was published conditionally, under the agreement that it "not have a happy ending, as such an ending would 'make homosexuality attractive'" (89). Ahmed points out how, in the history of queer literature and publishing, "the unhappy ending becomes a political gift" (ibid.). While inarguably an act of censorship, such a contract also "provid[es] a means for overcoming censorship" (ibid.) – for providing those living queer lives with a literature of their own, even if it might be one which reflects the misery, rather than the pleasures, of such lives. As Ahmed suggests here, and as Heather Love has explored in her book *Feeling Backwards* (2007), such unhappiness is a crucial aspect of the queer literary archive. Arguing that "we need a genealogy of queer affect that does not overlook the negative, shameful and difficult feelings that have been so central to queer existence in the last century" (127), Love's seminal text, among other such affirmations of queer unhappiness,[87] has acquired considerable theoretical saliency and momentum. This has been in part a response to contemporary impulses to forget such histories, instead "investing […] hope in alternative images of happy queers" (Ahmed 2010: 89). Such provocations instruct us to turn away from the easy gratification of happiness,

[87] See, for example, Lee Edelman (2004); Leo Bersani (1987); and Jack Halberstam (2011).

despite its allure, and instead to hold onto the potential of negativity, refusal, and even unhappiness. If, as Ahmed writes, "[q]ueer and feminist histories are the histories of those who are willing to risk the consequences of deviation" (ibid.), I read *Adult Onset* as a complex attempt to reckon with a very contemporary question: specifically, what happens to queer-feminist identities when such a risk is no longer always necessary?

If, as I discussed in earlier chapters, the lesbian has been an anachronistic figure in terms of her relationship to both feminism and queerness, here I propose that within the context of contemporary mainstream acceptance of gays and lesbians, the lesbian has suddenly, and often uncomfortably, fallen into step. What was once an embarrassing attachment to pathological domesticity has become a salient example of the ordinariness and respectability of same-sex families.[88] Following the 2014 publication of *Adult Onset*, in 2015 a special issue of the feminist cultural studies journal *differences* was released with the title *Queer Theory Without Antinormativity*. Claiming that "[a] defense against normativity is a guiding tenet of queer inquiry [and] also underwrites the critical analyses and political activisms of the field's most important interlocutors, including feminist theory, women of color feminism, and transgender studies" (3), in this volume prominent scholars including Love, Annamarie Jagose, and Robin Wiegman, reconsider the queer investment in, and attachment to, antinormativity. If, in 2007, Freeman professed that "what *isn't* queer" about her scholarship, specifically, is her willingness "to take seriously people's longing for that relief, for the privilege of being ordinary" (497, my emphasis), in this 2015 collection, this longing and relief is written into and legitimized as a consideration of queer theory. While the interventions in this collection are thought-provoking and rigorously attended to, I am curious about the motivations behind such a fundamental theoretical repositioning. It is significant that this volume and *Adult Onset* were published concurrently, reflecting the

[88] See, for example, *The Kids are All Right* (2010).

ambivalences produced – also among foundational figures in queer studies – by the embrace of the normative, even as it has provided other forms of legal, social, and domestic security. As Love wrote in 2000: "Things look pretty different these days. For one thing, lesbianism has gone mainstream in a way that few of us ever imagined […]. As gays and lesbians have achieved a modicum of social recognition and civil rights, settling down and having kids has become an increasingly plausible way of life for lesbians" (101). Through my reading of *Adult Onset*, I have thought about the ways in which this context of expanding civil rights and social recognition has produced a coinciding affect of disorientation and even shame in those feminist and queer subjects who have most benefited.

> For lesbians, the bittersweet pill to swallow may well turn out to be the fact that we are not so different after all. Giving up the myth of lesbian purity, lesbian difference, and the transformative power of love between women is quite a letdown. We come face to face with some intractable problems: gender isn't easy; power is unevenly distributed in relationships; love is always strange, and often ugly. (Love 2000: 113)

To Love's list, I would add an additional problem, one which in the case of *Adult Onset*, might in fact be the "bitterest pill to swallow". That is, that institutions and structures, such as those of marriage and family, might in fact be stronger than we imagined, and the difficulty of resisting their power, or transforming them from the inside, even more difficult. Via the paradigm of trauma and therapeutic culture, MacDonald has questioned the ways in which feminist methods and activism and the transformative potential of lesbian intimacy and existence have been supplanted by the grasp of the family.

In *Adult Onset*, we spend a disoriented week with Mary Rose. Her anxiety roams the pages, settling on everything and everyone, from the toxins that might be present in her children's toys, and the ethical sourcing of their food, to her parents' travel schedules and health. She struggles to control and optimize her own and her family's health, but feels

unhappy and out of control, uncomfortable in her new role as wife and mother, and its inability to satisfy her. In her desire to bury the recent past, she embarks on an even more disorienting journey to displace her trauma onto an older, repressed memory. Echoing feminist debates around insidious versus punctual trauma, and therapeutic culture, MacDonald provides the reader with no clear answers and no easily identifiable origin of trauma. Neither the repetitive, structural violence of sexism and homophobia, nor that of childhood abuse, are necessarily the sole sources of Mary Rose's psychic pain or incipient breakdown. Nor are therapeutic culture, lesbian intimacy, or even state-sanctioned marriage the antidote. Rather, these issues serve to highlight the precariousness of Mary Rose's new role as wife and mother and her fear of its inability to satisfy her.

MacDonald never explicitly characterizes Mary Rose as having been overtly or actively political. Rather, she describes her as identifying with and feeling implicitly included in feminist and queer politics through her identity as a lesbian and a woman. Because of her otherwise privileged status, Mary Rose's sense of her own marginalized identity has been located in her identity as a lesbian. The pleasure of this identification and of the intimacies that have been constructed within its borders have been key to how she positions herself in the world. In suddenly finding herself situated within the very institutions that she assumed would always exclude her, Mary Rose must negotiate what it means to inhabit the promises of an institution that she had thought would always exclude her, without relinquishing her politics, or, as MacDonald has said of her own history, "bur[ying] the past" (*Law Society of Upper Canada* 2014: online).

7 Conclusion

In her keynote address at the 2015 *Lesbian Lives: Lesbian Feminism Now* conference, Sara Ahmed described heterosexuality as an "elaborate support system". She said: "To leave heterosexuality can be to leave those institutional forms of protecting, cherishing, holding. You have less to fall back on when you fall. When things break, a whole life can unravel" (2015: online). In my introduction to this dissertation, I described intimacy as bearing a burden – as that which is expected to imbue a life with meaning. I described intimacy's capacity to transform us, to shelter us, and, indeed, to become the space within which we dwell. I also wrote of its inherent instability. In dialogue with the work of Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, I described the way that intimacy's pleasures are always, in a sense, haunted by its instability, the security that they provide haunted by its impermanence. Ahmed's words powerfully articulate this haunting and its discomfiting effect. Her words gesture towards the way that forms of "cherishing, protecting, and holding" have been institutionalized. Now more than ever, they attach to, and are made accessible to, certain identities and populations more than others. Thus, as Ahmed points out, to leave the security of institutionalized sanction and approval can mean to lose those forms of nurturing, protecting, and sustaining that make a life. There is a danger implied by these loses: "when things break, a whole life can unravel" (ibid.). In listening to, or here reading, Ahmed's words, one gets a sense of how vital intimacy is, and how much we risk when alienated from those structures and institutions to which it has become bound. Despite its presumed attribution of quintessential privacy, this risk is one of the things that reveals intimacy's broader political reach. As feminist theory has taught us, personal intimate structures are inextricable from public and political ones. As queer theory has taught us, this is exemplified by the publicly regulated and sanctioned institution of heterosexuality, which through its

structures of inclusion and exclusion designates some identities and intimacies, and not others, as desirable, as valuable, or, indeed, as worth the risk.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I situated my interventions within the contested space of the contemporary mainstreaming of queer and feminist politics and increasing access to formal legal equality for gays and lesbians. I discussed some of the debates that surround the question of where queer and feminist political energy should be directed and whether the transformative objectives of such politics have been left behind in favour of those which pursue forms of inclusion. I introduced my dissertation's focus on the relationship between intimacy and politics, which I also framed through the lens of the personal and political. I specified my usage of these key concepts, narrowing their broad theoretical and historical scopes and locating my analysis within feminist and queer commitments. I also specified my particular usage of 'the figure of the lesbian' and 'lesbian existence' as points of departure for theorizing and analysing the function of lesbianism within literary texts. I provided an account of the discipline of queer theory; here, I began to put it into dialogue with lesbian feminism, rather than to position one as prevailing over the other. I also specified my own usage of the term 'queer' as well as the ways in which it informs my research. In accounting for the literary archive from which I draw, I considered the question of what constitutes 'lesbian literature'. Instead of attempting to answer this question through my analyses, I have found it more productive to embrace the definitional instability of both the categories of lesbian and lesbian literature.

In Chapter Two, I situated my dissertation's interventions within the theoretical framings of affect, queer temporalities, and trauma. Acknowledging the theoretical and philosophical lineages of those first two concepts, which historically have also been explored through categories such as emotion, feeling, and time, I located my approach within the specific contemporary feminist and queer conceptions of affect and temporality. In

elaborating upon these two distinct theories I also highlighted the ways in which they intersect, putting forward my dissertation's particular usage of 'affective temporalities'. I considered how both affect and queer temporalities have been theorized as pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic forces or intensities. Such forces have been theorized as passing between bodies and as both constituting, and being constituted by, the space and time within which they are produced. I elaborated upon this invocation of 'bodies', relating it to one of the central interventions of my project – that of examining affect's connection with the literary. I described how, across my analyses, I would understand texts as bodies, examining not only those intimacies that are represented and produced within such textual bodies, but those that are transmitted to, and created between, the body of the text and the body of the reader

The third category with which I engaged in Chapter Two, was that of trauma theory. I argued that the ubiquity of diverse forms of intimate and structural violence in lesbian fiction reflects both women's proximity to such forces in everyday life, as well as early feminist political theorizations of, and responses to, trauma. I charted some of the key moments in the development of contemporary trauma studies and considered the ways in which feminist thinking and culture have influenced, and are influenced by, engagements between the two. Feminists active in the Women's Liberation Movement of the 1970s, emphasized disclosure and speaking out as central to projects of politicizing conventionally private experiences such as incest, domestic violence, and sexual assault. I explored how, as part of the larger project of deconstructing the boundaries between the personal and political, these approaches to trauma have become central to feminist thought and practice. In elaborating on the practice of feminist therapy and therapeutic culture more generally, I provided the background for my claim that the narrative of abuse, repression, and recovery is frequently reproduced in the narrative structure of lesbian fiction.

In Chapter Three, I argued that while most political movements might be said to

share a commitment to utopian ideals, lesbian feminism and lesbian identity are not only invested in, but have been profoundly and radically configured by, such ideals. Tracing the historical development of such configurations, I moved from early associations between lesbianism and female romantic friendship to the psychoanalytic articulations of French feminism that proffer more explicit propositions of lesbian separatism. I traced the theoretical, political, and literary enunciations of lesbianism's embodiment of feminist consciousness and transformative politics as well as some of the major critiques of such a positioning. In the second half of the chapter, I discussed a selection of literary work from the 1980s and 1990s, particularly that of Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Dorothy Allison. Through these texts, I explored the way that lesbian fiction reflects, enacts, and advances the political and theoretical connections being made at the time between feminism, trauma, and the intersectional forces of race, class, and sexual orientation

Chapter Four was the first of three chapters of close reading, each of which attended to one of MacDonald's novels. Through an analysis of MacDonald's first novel *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), I explored the way that lesbian existence functions to produce incongruous or unexpected affective spaces around cultural and historical traumas such as war. *Fall on Your Knees* is a historical novel, set in the 1920s. Within this context, I read the Armistice, not WWI, as a time and space of rupture. I situated the novel within the broader context of the work being produced in the last decades of the twentieth century, in both fiction and non-fiction, that aimed to recuperate lost or omitted gay and lesbian histories. The novel reflects this preoccupation, both in terms of the impact of wartime on the sex/gender system, and women's wider participation in the public sphere. I argued that the text exploits moments of uncertainty – ruptures in the teleological flow of history – to conceive of alternate possibilities and to invite us to imagine utopias in these liminal spaces. Of particular interest in this chapter was how MacDonald uses language, narrative structure, temporality, affect,

and genre (in this case the historical novel), to produce a site of lesbian-feminist possibility, only to violently disrupt and disturb it. I argued that while most literature thematising this topic has done so via an examination of material conditions such as expanded access to employment, MacDonald's strategy is to construct this space through affect and language.

In Chapter Five, through a reading of MacDonald's second novel *The Way the Crow Flies*, I positioned post-WWII Canada as another space of rupture. I argued that the family at the centre of the novel, the McCarthy's, encapsulate the post-WWII reconsolidation of Canadian national identity. Through an examination of the private memory culture of the family, and the protagonist Madeleine McCarthy's sexual abuse, I claimed that MacDonald reveals the family as a dense and affective site for the discursive and performative production of the nation. I read Madeleine's sexual abuse as representative of the violent, intimate, and gendered ways in which disobedient subjects are disciplined. Recalling the narrativization of trauma that I explored in Chapter Three, I claimed that Madeleine's story recites a familiar trajectory of abuse, repression, recovery, and survivorship, securely locating it within an archive of lesbian novels which foreground trauma. In addition, I claimed Madeleine as a 'feminist killjoy' in order to explore the significance of her inability either to disclose her abuse, or to put it aside and participate in the happiness of her family I engaged the concept of lesbian existence in positioning Madeleine's relationship to trauma within the narrative trajectory described above. I claimed that the intimacy produced through eventual disclosures to her mother, her therapist, and her new girlfriend functions in the text as antidote to Madeleine's adult dysfunction.

In the dissertation's third and final close reading, I examined MacDonald's 2014 novel *Adult Onset*. I read the disorientation of the protagonist, as well as the disorientation embedded in the novel's structure itself, as symptomatic of what I framed as another space and time of rupture, and perhaps a less obvious one, that of the new access to the finally

'ordinary' modes of contemporary queer life. Engaging the paradigm of insidious trauma, which I discussed in Chapter Two, I read MacDonald's novel as a provocation, reminding us that while embracing the 'good life' promised by contemporary queer rights may be appealing, it does not erase the harms of the past. In *Adult Onset*, insidious forms of trauma such as the sexism and homophobia of the protagonist's parents, are less easy to acknowledge than the punctual event of abuse that she strives to recollect. The novel's ability to represent such insidious forms is what characterizes the broader themes of the dissertation, where the need to narrativize contemporary relationships to complex politics invites, and necessitates, the recognition of paradoxical complicities and ambivalences.

All of the novels that I attended to in this dissertation are profuse with trauma. In compiling an archive of texts that consider both lesbianism and sexual violence, there is a risk of reinforcing the already fraught connections between sexual orientation and sexual trauma. However, I do not view the effect of combining these themes as a pathologizing one. Rather, I understand these texts as revealing the ways in which women, lesbian women in particular, are frequently located in proximity to violence. Exploring intimacy, affect, and temporality, through the frame of trauma, is a generative project, particularly in the context of literature. As I pointed out through my engagement with the work of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, trauma frequently emerges in ways that upset conventional understandings of temporality and affect. Memories of trauma are processed in fragmentary, often belated forms that lend themselves well to representation through literature. MacDonald's work, in particular, demonstrates different ways of dealing with consciousness of therapeutic culture and knowledge of trauma in literary works. MacDonald has spoken openly about her identification as a lesbian and a feminist. This is manifested in her work in many ways, including in her engagement with trauma. Each of the three novels that I examined in this dissertation evidences her familiarity with both trauma and therapeutic

culture. All three novels feature evocative, yet often disturbing and disorienting, descriptions of the complex processes of traumatic memory – its burial and its unpredictable or belated surfacing. These descriptions evoke not only imaginative or intuitive knowledge, but also familiarity with the theories of trauma that I described in Chapter Two. I argue, however, that in the final novel to be analysed in the dissertation, *Adult Onset*, there is a shift in MacDonald's style of traumatic narration. While her descriptions of Mary Rose's symptoms – dissociation, disorientation, and shame – are consistent with those represented in her earlier novels, MacDonald's attribution of self-awareness to her protagonist might be read as a self-reflexive move in this, her most autobiographical novel.

Feminist philosophers and epistemologists have theorized the ways in which the production of knowledge is gendered. Scholars such as Clare Hemmings and Ahmed have considered citational practice as a way of constructing and locating knowledge and authority in certain ways and locations. As Ahmed writes, "[w]e thus enact feminism in how we relate to the academy. (2017: 15). If, as I discussed in this dissertation's introduction, lesbianism has been theorized in relation to invisibility (or not theorized at all) here I suggest that this invisibility extends to the circulation of theory and scholarship. As a project concerned with the figure of the lesbian, lesbian existence, and political lesbian feminism, it has been my practice to foreground the work of those thinkers whose work resists the erasing and normalizing practices of citational expectation and legibility.

This commitment has extended to the dissertation's locations of theoretical and political attention. I have examined intimacy as a dense site of private personal and political investment. Situating my interventions in the political, theoretical, and literary traditions of feminist and queer thought, I have examined lesbianism in its political, sexual, and social manifestations to think about the complex ways in which we expect to enact politics via intimacy. Central to my work has been the project of reclaiming lesbian feminism.

Following scholars such as Hemmings, Victoria Hesford, and Elizabeth Freeman, I have challenged those progress narratives that position lesbian feminism as the outdated predecessor of queer theory.

"Affective Temporalities," the designating concept of my title, has had two functions. Firstly, it has signalled the centrality of theories of affect and queer temporalities to the analyses across my dissertation. Secondly, it has encapsulated the dissertation's conception of intimacy: That is, as implicitly connected to and constituted by affect and temporality. This refers not only to physical, but also to emotional, psychic, and imagined spaces between bodies. I have proposed that a text might be also be understood as such a body. I have understood intimacies as constituted by affective encounters, generated and sustained within particular spatial and temporal contexts. Likewise, time, space, and feeling are reciprocally constituted by intimate relations and encounters. This dynamic interplay of what have been described in affect theory as 'intensities' determines and shapes the possibilities and boundaries of intimacies created. These intersecting theories of affect and queer temporality have formed the theoretical background for my thesis. I have understood affect to be that which queers temporality, so to speak, insofar as it bind bodies to bodies in space and time.

Understandings of time as it relates to affect have allowed me to foreground the centrality of embodiment, desire, and intimacy, in my taking up of the paradigm of queerness. In thinking queer and lesbian together, this characteristic becomes both implicit, and perhaps more importantly, explicit. I have described how theorists such as Valerie Traub, Carolyn Dinshaw, and Heather Love have invoked the affective dynamics of queer history. Such a dynamic recognizes and even embraces the affective ties that bind scholars to their objects of study. Affective temporalities then, have been central to my project, both in terms of method, as described above, and motivation, in terms of my own affective

disposition towards the past, and my desire to reconsider the lesbian feminist investment in the political potential of intimacy.

Although, as I have shown, affect has been taken up across a number of disciplines, there is surprisingly little work attending to the function of affect in literature. Through the close readings in this dissertation, I have theorized and demonstrated the production of affect as specifically related to literary form. Through my engagement with the work of Ann-Marie MacDonald, I have shown how literary devices such as fragmentation, juxtaposition, and blank spaces produce and transmit textual affects. Following my engagements with her work, I suggest that MacDonald's experimentation with narration and form produces a relationship between text and reader that functions beyond straightforward identification, witnessing or even empathy for the characters in her novels. My readings have shown how, through MacDonald's careful production of affect, the reader is positioned in proximity to textual scenes, a positioning which is at times pleasurable, but often, in her work, traumatic.

I read MacDonald's focus on female experience, embodiment, and connection, as enacting the politics of lesbian feminism. While not always explicitly political, her work is clearly, and often self-consciously, influenced by her feminist identity. This is evident in the way that she writes about trauma, which displays an awareness not only of trauma theory, but of more explicitly lesbian feminist contexts, such as, for example, those of survivor discourse and therapeutic culture. In addition to being influenced by feminist thought and politics, I read MacDonald's work as simultaneously possessing a queer sensibility. This emerges in her upsetting of conventional notions of futurity, and progress, as in *Fall on Your Knees* or *The Way the Crow Flies*, or of subjective security or contentment, as in *Adult Onset*, which depicts the disorientation and guilt that accompanies the sudden inclusion into previously oppressive and alienating institutions. In this way, MacDonald's work has provoked me to bring together the often presumed to be irreconcilable discourses and

registers of lesbian feminism and queer theory.

At the end of *Adult Onset*, Mary Rose is no longer able to stop the unravelling that she has been fending off over the course of the novel. She agrees to have an old friend - Gigi - provide her with company and support. While Mary Rose has become a mother and settled into domestic, married life, Gigi remains unattached, rides a motorcycle, and holds no qualms about flirting with Mary Rose's married friends. Attempting to console Mary Rose, Gigi says: "We never thought we'd be able to get married. We thought we were out in the cold, so we made the cold into a party, but cold is cold and family is family and you guys are mine" (353). Gigi's words, as I have claimed about MacDonald's work more generally, can be read as articulating both the lesbian feminist and queer investments in alternative forms of intimacy and kinship.

Mary Rose's character, however, is more ambivalent than Gigi's. Her guilt and unhappiness seem to be at least partially the result of her inability to reconcile herself with her desire for inclusion in those structures that were once the active sites of her disavowal. I read MacDonald's intervention as reflecting those wider debates that challenge the presumed political identification of marginalized subjects. Her oeuvre's persistent disorientations and complex resolutions might be read as signalling the productivity of being located in a political and cultural moment in which identity no longer implicitly signals politics. In the absence of this, perhaps a more explicit and active form of political identification and activism must be nurtured and encouraged. Despite its frustrating lack of concrete orientation or unambiguous avowal, this contemporary space of discomfort and unease might also be understood as generative, enabling political commitments capable of sustaining unexpected, and even transformative forms of intimacy.

In contemplating the title of this dissertation, I was torn between two terms: lesbian feminism, and queer feminism. While the focus of my project has been to re-examine and

re-invest in the contributions of lesbian feminism, it has also been to re-position them within the context of contemporary queer theory. I have described the ways in which lesbian feminism has been disavowed as the abject figure of both feminist and queer history and politics. For my title to carry this designation, then, would not only specify the dissertation's content, but also perform the reclamation for which it argues. However, I questioned whether the explicit designation of lesbian feminism might not only signal, but mark my work with, the anachronism associated with such politics. At the heart of the political and intellectual projects of feminism and queerness, are personal investments and attachments. For one's object of study to also be the ambivalent object of identification, necessitates a making-vulnerable as well as a risk. The necessity to make one's work legible within contemporary academic contexts demands that one locate oneself within the progress narratives that I have critiqued in this dissertation. Furthermore, what constitutes knowledge in many academic disciplines is premised on presumed attributions of objectivity, which are inherently at odds with those queer and feminist epistemologies which refuse such positionality. These complexities reveal, enact, and structure projects of political transformation, which demand as rigorous an attention to intimate structures as to public and intellectual ones.

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